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I TELL YOU





*Photograph*]

ALBERT DE COURVILLE.

[*Swaine*

*Frontispiece.*

# I TELL YOU

By  
ALBERT DE COURVILLE

*WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS*

CHAPMAN  
AND HALL<sup>LD</sup>



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# I TELL YOU

## CHAPTER I BEGINNINGS

FOR one who has spent so large a part of his life in endeavouring to adapt and produce the talents and personalities of other people, there must necessarily be some diffidence when he is thrown back upon his own resources and faced by the problem of exploiting himself. And this is my present difficulty. The reader will have no difficulty in crediting that my own life has been of the utmost interest to me personally, but whether or no there is any extraneous and detached amusement to be gained from it I simply cannot tell.

My diffidence is slightly alleviated, however, when I recall a noteworthy fact concerning memoirs—that is, that a great amount of people read them less for the story of the writer himself than for the likelihood of alluring anecdotes about other people that might leak out in the telling. And in this respect I think I ought to come up to the mark. Even if my life has not been a perpetual turmoil, I can certainly claim that I have moved amongst interesting people all the time—both apart from and in the theatre.

I cannot, of course, definitely say that my life itself has been humdrum and banal. I have, indeed,

three or four times done what is possibly the most enthralling thing of all in life—that is, I have three or four times been within an inch of losing it. Earthquakes, shipwrecks, blazing coal mines, Borgia poisoning scenes, revolutions . . . all have been part of my existence, and with the mosaic of such incidents I may be fortunate enough to formulate a story that may be interesting to those who have had an equally turbulent existence in other walks of life.

I cannot, however, as I commence my story, tell any romantic tale of a flaming ambition slowly fulfilled, of a special talent slowly asserting itself—I cannot even say that I started without a friend or penny in the world. As a matter of fact, I was reared in the lap of luxury, and made to see a great deal of the world practically in my infancy.

After this, however, my position became a little unique. For a time came, and this was still quite early in my life, when I was left actually without any resources of my own.

While still in my teens, in fact, it was necessary for me to decide what I should do.

I tried quite a few things, but in each instance I was intelligent enough to realise early that the prospects were not very good, and it was because of this that my first occupation, in an electrical engineer's office, was quickly put on one side.

I remember I was asked, the first day of my engagement, by the head of the firm, to see if a certain electrical fitting could not be sold to a very elegant hatters' shop in Regent Street. I was told

that one of the heavy fittings in one of the windows was smashed and that I should offer a very beautiful shade to cover it.

Full of zeal I went to this shop, approached the manager, pointed out to him that the fitting in question was broken, and made my suggestion. He turned to me angrily, and asked me if I did not realise that because the glass shade was broken he was benefiting by being able to display three or four more hats in the window by hanging them on the globes. I could not think on the spur of the moment of an answer, so I left the hat shop and my employers in disgust.

My next brief experience was on the Corn Exchange. I could speak and write three or four languages fluently. In fact, I was overloaded with education for a youth of my age. So I utilised these languages to obtain a position with a firm of corn brokers in the City.

This was quite a success for me, and I learned all about oats, barley, wheat and maize and the manner in which this business was done. Eventually, I was given even the opportunity to take some samples of grain to the Baltic—the Corn Exchange—and see if I could sell a consignment or two. I was fortunate enough to sell at my first endeavour a cargo of Odessa wheat.

Several months passed by and I found myself being able to put by quite a little money. But my ambition was always to do something different, something big. I envied the men who travelled, who used their brains and powers of observation to their own advantage. I felt within myself a desire to keep in touch with the world continuously

without being tied down to one particular place for too long ; so I left. I decided to go to Paris.

I had been writing a great deal in my spare time, and in some cases I had submitted my work to the newspapers. I was fortunate in one or two instances in having my contributions accepted. Generally I would write something apropos of some momentous topical question, and also little humorous articles. I even wrote verse.

I wanted, in fact, to become a journalist. But I realised it would be perfectly useless to write in to any newspaper and ask for the opportunity, and so I at last resolved to have recourse to a little strategy.

On a certain day I was leaving for Paris at two o'clock in the afternoon, and I arrived at Charing Cross station about a quarter of an hour before the train left. While at the station I decided that I would ring up on the telephone the Editor of the *Evening News*. The man who answered the telephone naturally asked what I wanted with the Editor. I replied that the matter was important and that I had to speak to him personally.

There was some delay at the other end of the telephone, but eventually a man came and spoke to me. It was Mr. J. M. Dick, the well-known sporting writer of the *Evening News*, who was at that time the Acting Editor of the *Evening News* under Mr. W. J. Evans, the Editor-in-Chief. Without any preamble, I said I would like to join the staff of the *Evening News*. He asked me : " Is this what you called up for ? " I said : " Yes." He said : " Why didn't you write instead of ringing up asking for a job ? " I said I knew perfectly well

if I wrote in I would get either no answer at all or one which would only upset me, and that I wanted to know definitely whether it was possible or not. I said I was leaving for Paris within a few minutes, but that I would return on the Monday morning (the day I telephoned was a Saturday) if he would make a definite appointment to see me. The pause which followed suggested surprise. Then he said: "Very well, I will see you on Monday." I said: "Are you sure you will see me and not put me on to someone under you, because I shall come back from Paris specially to see you?" The answer was: "*Yes*, I will see you."

The following Monday I returned from Paris to keep the appointment. I went to Carmelite House, and I was asked to fill up a form, stating what my business was. I filled it up with the information that I came to keep an appointment made on the telephone with the Editor on the Saturday previously, and that I had come specially from Paris to keep it.

When ushered upstairs, some youth approached me and said: "Are you the fellow that rang up on the telephone for a job?" I said: "Yes." Then I saw the Editor.

He seemed amused, and asked what experience I had had. "None whatever," I said. The following was the conversation:

"What do you expect to do here?"

"Anything."

"Do you know shorthand?"

"No."

"Have you ever done any police court reporting?"

"No."

"Have you ever been on the staff of any newspaper in England ? "

"No."

"Anywhere in the world ? "

"No."

He sat back and looked at me with a smile. "You seem to have every qualification for being a successful journalist," he said. And then he decided that he would take me on trial on the staff as a reporter, and the next day I started.

## CHAPTER II

### LIFE AS A JOURNALIST

**T**O say that I was thrilled is to put it very mildly indeed.

The first thing that impressed me in my new employment was the utter callousness of the staff of the Sub-Editors who sat round a table with the Chief Sub-Editor at their head. They dealt with all the tragedies and big events of the world with an indifference which astonished me. The most sensational events would be telegraphed and telephoned to the office, and they would look calmly at every piece of news and sit in judgment on only one thing—what was its news value? A motor-car accident would elicit the remark: "Give it a 'G,'" which would mean a small paragraph with one line of heading. Then some important political announcement would come up and another position would be allotted to it, say the top half of a column on the front page. The biggest news of the day would mean the "*clock*" position, which meant the first two or three columns on the left-hand side of the front page.

I was eager to write and see something of mine in print, and I waited patiently for my opportunity; but all the other reporters who were sitting with me in the reporters' room seemed to be called out by the News Editor one by one and put on different



missions for the day, until only I was left, and I would await my turn in vain. Apparently the News Editor felt afraid of entrusting me with anything.

But my chance came at last, and my first commission was that of going to Hoxton to report on a soup kitchen that had been opened by a certain clergyman! I solemnly proceeded to Hoxton, was made a tremendous fuss of by the reverend somebody, was shown round the wonderful soup kitchen, came back and wrote about three columns about it. I waited patiently for every edition of the paper to come out and looked for my wonderful descriptive story in print. My heart sank as edition after edition came out with no mention of my soup kitchen.

When the last edition came out and the staff had gone home, I asked one of the clerks in the office why my article had not appeared, and he answered that it must have been crowded out by more important news, or, "Perhaps there was something wrong with it," he added. I explained that I had written a very full report about this Hoxton affair, and asked what had happened to it. "I suppose it is on the 'spike,'" he said coldly, pointing to a long upstanding nail at the side of the Chief Sub's blotting pad. It was explained to me that if the "copy" was too long for the value of the news or for any other reason, all contributions would be mercilessly spiked on this nail.

I asked to look at the Chief Sub-Editor's spike, and patiently removed each one of the sheets of paper that had been put thereon. Eventually I found my cherished "story" stabbed to the heart.

I sat down patiently and reduced its length by about one-half, placed it on his desk and waited the whole of the next day, with the same result. In the evening, I decided that I would still further reduce it. I wrote about a hundred lines and put it under a different heading and in a different form and placed it once more on the Chief Sub-Editor's desk. On the following day, to my great joy, this paragraph appeared :

“To alleviate the suffering of the poor in the neighbourhood, a soup kitchen was opened at Hoxton yesterday.”

True there were only two or three lines without a heading of any kind, and it was placed in some hidden corner of the paper, but I felt that I had made a start.

I could not help envying some of my brother reporters when they were approached to go after a famous crime case on a mission to get information exclusively for the newspaper. There was one man on the staff at that time (he is now dead) who was famous for his ability in securing “scoops,” as an exclusive story is called, for the newspaper.

He would be put on a sensational murder, and he would always connect with the office early in the afternoon with valuable information which he would obtain in some way or another even before the police.

I began to realise that when in the office they clamoured for “news,” just “news,” they meant something different to what I had anticipated. I longed for an opportunity to go out and do something worth while, and you can imagine my delight when the Chief Sub-Editor one morning took me

aside and said to me : " There is a gorilla at the Zoo that a keeper has actually taught to speak. Here is a photograph of it," and he handed me a photograph which had been cut out of some newspaper. He said, with a twinkle in his eye to which I paid no attention at the time, " I want you to go and see it and interview it. Naturally, it will not answer you logically, but try and make your questions fit with any statement that this gorilla makes."

There was something very odd about this photograph. I could not see how it could be the photograph of a gorilla. True, it had somewhat Simian features, but a clerical collar underneath the head made me feel that something was not quite right. I could not then recognise from what paper this photograph had been cut, but I bought all the morning papers and eventually found that it been cut out of the *Daily News* and was the photograph of some deacon in the north of England.

I felt that this was adding insult to injury, and that obviously they were trying to see how ingenuous and naïf I really was. I wondered for a little while as to what I should do. I argued to myself, " If I take this back and say, ' This is not a gorilla, and it is a clergyman's photograph cut out from the *Daily News*, it would be a foolish thing to do ; because I should have seen that the moment he handed me the picture—and my heart sank as I felt that I had been so silly. Naturally, I had not expected a prank of this kind to be played on me. So I decided to write an article on humorous lines, to the effect that I had seen at the Zoo a gorilla

with curiously ecclesiastical characteristics. I dwelt on his pious expression, the way he would throw his head back and put the palms of his hands together as if in prayer, and a whole lot of nonsense of this description, to show the Chief Sub-Editor that at any rate I had taken him at his word.

I gave this in, and I am glad, at any rate it did make him laugh.

At the end of that week I received a very nice letter terminating my engagement.

I was not in any way discouraged, however, for by this time I had realised what I really had to do, and I set about it earnestly.

Apart from the usual staff of a newspaper, there is always an opportunity for any member of the public to make some money by telephoning, telegraphing, or conveying by any other means a valuable piece of news to a newspaper the moment it occurs. There are also in Fleet Street a large number of "free lance" reporters. They are not on the regular staff of any particular journal, but they make a good, substantial living in this way. They would be paid so much for the information, or if their copy were used, at the rate of so much a line. Some of the men who proved their worth to an Editor would be attached to the staff apart from the general reporters. They were known as "space" men.

"Space" meant that you were paid for each line that was printed. This kind of work is by no means easy and puts every man on his mettle. He has to compete with the brains of all the

Editors, News Editors, Sub-Editors in London, and with all the big news agencies, such as Reuters, Central News, Press Association, etc.

I had learned that the News Editors would read carefully through every newspaper in the morning, and whenever he came across an interesting paragraph which could be elaborated, he would cut it out and put a man on the job.

One morning I picked up my newspaper and read that a certain person, who had lived as a man in the neighbourhood, had been found dead in his home in South London, and upon his death it was found that he was not a man at all but a woman : a good-looking young woman, in fact, who had been posing as a man for five years. She had been employed in the City as a clerk, had had love affairs with girls, and had been generally accepted in men's company as a man.

This story caused quite a sensation, because she had never even been suspected. Her death occurred under somewhat tragic conditions, and every reporter in London on that particular morning was busy trying to get particulars about her life. I joined in the quest, and after hunting round from house to house, enquiring right and left, I managed to secure a diary kept by this woman, several photographs of her as a woman and as a man, love letters, short stories, poems and all other kinds of documents which she had written and left behind, and which I knew would be of the utmost value to the newspapers. I had obtained these not on the scene where this woman had been living, but in an entirely different part of London, where I had traced a female relative who was aware of her

masquerade, and whom I induced to speak on the subject.

I had to use all my wits to obtain these things from her, but I promised her some money, with a little on account, and then I had to decide to which newspaper I would sell my material. I could have gone to any London daily, but I was piqued by my experience on the *Evening News*, and I decided to go there.

This time I did not go up the lift right away at Carmelite House, as I had gone previously. I had to fill in a form downstairs, stating my business. I asked to see Mr. Evans, and stated that my business concerned the "lady" whose name was in every paper. A message was sent down right away for me to go upstairs to his office. I went up, and with some natural pride showed him what I had got. The Editor patted me on the back, congratulated me, and asked what I wanted for my information. I quickly suggested that I should write the articles myself and be paid so much a line. In this way I thought I would get back on the staff.

He agreed that I should be paid that way, and on the same day my first real contribution to a newspaper appeared. It took almost a column, and nearly all her autobiography, verses, etc., were printed daily for some time afterwards. The result was as I anticipated. I was taken back on the staff on "space."

From this time I made really rapid progress, and there now began one of the most interesting though exhausting periods of my life.

Of course, my languages and knowledge of the Continent stood me in good stead, and I had some really thrilling experiences. I was young and I did not care what chances I took.

But whatever I did was always done with the determination to get in first with the news, and Edgar Wallace, who has mentioned in his book, *People*, some of the stories on which he and I, who were contemporaries at that time, met, has also been kind enough to say the following :

*"De Courville I knew from his early youth, when he was a reporter under me on the 'Evening News.' He was, I think, the most courageous kid I have ever known—nothing daunted him. He went over to report the wreck of the 'Berlin' on a stormy wintry night, leaving London in a dress jacket and thin shoes, and got the best story of the disaster that was received in London. The effort nearly killed him."*

I interviewed any number of famous people, and a knowledge of shorthand I soon found out was not necessary. In fact, it was most important to produce no paper or pencil when securing an interview with some important personage. The presence of paper and pencil usually made them careful as to what they said, whereas in the ordinary course of conversation they would at the least provocation let themselves go and make interesting and quotable observations.

It would take too long to give here a proper account of the most interesting stories on which I worked ; and besides, at this date, they would be of little interest. I think it will be interesting, however, if I mention one or two of the most important

errands on which I had an opportunity of doing something worth while, and I will begin by relating some of these and then tell the story that my friend, Edgar Wallace, mentioned in the above quotation.

My first adventure took place during the early days of the Suffragettes' movement, and at that time I was working not only for the *Evening News*, but for the *Daily Mail* as well.

It will be remembered that when one of the Suffragette organisations was first formed, with Mrs. Pethick Lawrence, Mrs. General Drummond, Miss Christabel Pankhurst and all the other ladies, the newspapers were flooded with news of this movement. In fact, some may recall their many demonstrations outside the House of Commons and elsewhere, sometimes with serious consequences.

It was in connection with this movement (on which I was put right from the very outset by the Editor) that I made quite a great many enemies among their leaders by my articles, which were not always couched in sympathetic language.

One day there was a tremendous mêlée outside the House of Commons and Westminster Abbey, and several arrests were effected. The columns were full of the fact that among the women taken were some very young girls, who could not have had any knowledge of such a thing as Suffragism. It was plainly hinted in some quarters that these young girls were being paid by the organisation for making these demonstrations.

Among those arrested on this particular day was a girl of about sixteen, named Dora Thewlis. This Yorkshire lassie had been put in prison.



In referring to this, I had said that it was incredible that such a child could be prompted to create disturbances and risk imprisonment by sheer zeal for women's suffrage and no other reason.

Headquarters retorted that she was an ardent Suffragette, and that it was a perfect lie to suggest that she was being used by the Suffragettes for the purpose of demonstration.

She was in Holloway Prison and was due to come up on the following Saturday before the Westminster County Court. The question then arose—Was Dora Thewlis really a rabid Suffragette or was she just a girl employed to further the ideals of the band that were promoting women's suffrage?

I suggested to the Editor that it would be a good thing to interview this lady. He answered back: "She is in prison; how are you going to interview her?" I said I would like to try. He laughed and said: "How do you propose to do that?" I had not the slightest idea of how to get into a women's gaol for the purposes of an interview, but I said that I could but try—and I succeeded.

I realised that the first thing to do was to get hold of some official at the Women's Social and Political Union headquarters, who would help me to do this. It would have been perfectly useless to have gone to some of the famous leaders mentioned above. So I made the acquaintance of one of the senior officials, whose name I will not mention even at this date. I saw the lady, who was very charming and very nice, took her out to lunch, and pointed out to her that the scandal of this young girl's imprisonment should be dealt with immediately. I told her it was absolutely im-

perative for her to seek admission to the gaol and to see this girl at the earliest possible moment.

She agreed, but seemed puzzled as to how to get this permit, so I suggested that she should send a reply-paid telegram to the Governor of the prison. To my delight she agreed to do so, not only in her name, but in the name also of the organisation. I advised her to keep silent about this move, to tell no one about it, not even her own associates, giving her many reasons for preserving secrecy, and she agreed.

I was on tenterhooks for the remainder of the day. On the Governor's reply depended my success or failure, and it seemed weeks before I received a telephone message from my friend, informing me that she had just had a reply from the Governor, saying she would be allowed to see the girl at Holloway Gaol at ten o'clock the following morning.

And at ten o'clock the next morning we duly presented ourselves at Holloway Gaol. At the entrance gates she handed over the telegram entitling her to admission: the man read the telegram, nodded, and asked who I was. I mumbled some excuse about being very much interested in the girl for philanthropic reasons, and we were shown into a little room divided into two parts by a strong grid. Soon behind this grid appeared a pretty young girl in prison garb with a number badge on her dress. It was Dora Thewlis, in charge of a wardress.

The lady with me, whom I shall call Miss X, put a question to her as to how she felt about being in gaol.

The girl, who appeared very frightened, answered :  
" I don't like it. How long shall I be in here ? "

Just as Miss X was about to speak words of comfort, I put in a word, and said : " This is a serious matter, my dear, and it may mean a term of imprisonment. Tell us why you did this. Are you willing to go to prison for women's suffrage ? " etc., etc., etc. I rattled off question after question as quickly as I could, for our time was strictly limited.

The poor girl then burst into tears, and said that she did not understand anything at all about it, and that her mother and father had written to her from Huddersfield, which was her native town, and told her to bear up.

I asked her if she had the letter, and she showed two letters through the grid to us. I knew I was not allowed to take down a copy of the letters or make any notes, so I tried hard to memorise these two letters in the short time she held them up to us. It is odd how on such occasions the human brain performs miracles. By the time I had left I had the two letters indelibly photographed in my mind, and on reaching the street I wrote the contents down almost word for word.

Before leaving, I said to her : " You will be brought up at Westminster County Court on Saturday. You had better tell the Magistrate what you told me, that you had no reason for having done what you did and that you are sorry, and that you want to go home to your father and mother."

She said that she would be glad to do it, that her family had no idea she would go to prison. She

cried. We consoled her, and then the time was up and we had to go out.

So we went out, Miss X. began to feel alarmed at the information that had been given out in my presence, and she said to me: "This might mean my dismissal from my job if it ever gets out. Please don't say anything about it."

I told her that if she did lose her situation, I would guarantee that she obtained another one.

I then went back to the office of the *Evening News*, arriving early in the afternoon. I sought out Mr. W. J. Evans, and I said to him that I had interviewed the girl in gaol.

He scoffed at the idea, and asked how I did it.

I gave him all the facts and information, and told him that the girl who got me in might lose her job through it.

He replied that whatever promise I made to her would be fulfilled, and surely enough this lady eventually occupied an important post at Carmelite House and married happily. Mr. Evans was delighted, and he immediately went to press for that afternoon edition with an interview with this girl.

Needless to say, this was quite a sensation. It provoked other evening newspapers, such as the *Evening Standard*, to cast aspersions on the veracity of this interview, and, indeed, in the late evening edition of the same day the story was denied by the officials of the W.S.P.U. itself. All this, of course, caused some anxiety at Carmelite House as to whether I had faked the story or not.

Also the same evening I was called into the pre-

sence of the Editor of the *Daily Mail*. He told me that Lord Northcliffe—in those days Sir Alfred Harmsworth—had been on the telephone and queried my story, chiefly because of the statement that I had made that she was in prison garb and had a number. The Editor told me that anyone arrested on remand had no right to be so attired until convicted.

But I insisted on my facts being perfectly true, and I gave all details in answer to his questions. The result being that I was asked to write a column for the *Daily Mail* the following morning on the subject of the prison uniform.

Questions were asked in the House of Commons within a day or so as to how a reporter was allowed inside Holloway Gaol to interview a prisoner, and the usual answer was given: "Notice must be given of the question." The Suffragettes again denied the truth of the story, and made every effort to obtain admission to the prison. This was now firmly refused. I stuck to my guns and, in reply to the doubts cast on our interview, wrote that on the Saturday at Westminster County Court she would come up before the Magistrate and then one could easily see whether this girl was going to say to the Magistrate what she had told to the *Evening News* representative or not.

I need not say it was an anxious moment when the Saturday morning arrived, and the Court was crowded with Suffragettes, reporters, and a very large crowd of people who had been reading about the case.

Eventually Miss Thewlis came into the dock. The Magistrate put the question to her as to why she

caused a disturbance right away, and she tearfully replied, just as I had said, that she did not know, and that she wanted to get back to her father and mother at Huddersfield at once. She promised never to do it again. The Magistrate, commenting on the fact that she was only a child, let her go on condition that she would be accompanied by wardresses, and that nobody would be allowed to approach her until she got home to her family.

I listened intently, and when things had developed just as I anticipated, in the *Evening News* I was naturally very much relieved.

In the evening news came to the office from Huddersfield that the girl had reached home and that no newspaper correspondent of that city had been allowed to speak to her.

I was then asked to go to Huddersfield by the night train specially to interview her again.

I arrived at Huddersfield in the early hours of the morning and found my way to her house, with some qualms as to the reception I would receive from the family. There were two or three local pressmen outside waiting patiently for the father, a member of the labouring classes, to come out and be interviewed. I went boldly to the door at that early hour and knocked. It was a poor sort of home, and I was asked who I was from the darkness within. I said: "I am the gentleman who spoke to your daughter in prison." I went in, and the family had a lot to say to me; in fact, a whole lot, especially the father. The girl asked me why I did not tell her who I was, and the father asked me why I did not mind my own business.

It appeared that the mother was an ardent Suffra-

gist, and that it was done in a sincere effort to promote her views. I had to use all my wits. I explained how the poor girl cried and how she loved her father and mother. I gave dramatic details of prison life, which made the father and mother feel very sorry for their daughter, and in the end they expressed their delight at having her home again.

I left the house and telephoned the story through to London. It appeared in the afternoon edition, and amusingly enough it was telegraphed from London to the Huddersfield papers and printed.

I think, though, that the greatest thrill of all that fell to my lot during this journalistic period was provided by the big coal mine disaster of Courrières, in the North of France.

It will be remembered that some two thousand miners died, that the coal pits were on fire for many days, and that after fifteen days two miners were found alive in the raging furnace deep down below the earth. Their names were Nenry and Prevost. I daresay there are many who remember this incident. I do not think in our time there has been a bigger mine disaster than this one.

I was sent out immediately to get the latest news about this holocaust.

When I arrived at Courrières, I first of all went to the estaminet outside the large gates of the mine and there actually met Carpentier, the subsequent boxing champion, in miner's kit. It was pointed out to me that he was a great boxer among the miners. He was a good-looking youth, but I paid little attention to him at that time.

What gripped my soul was the sight of hundreds of poor women in black dresses with their children and white-faced, haggard men, standing anxiously outside the gates, waiting to hear the news of their husbands, brothers or sons. Had they been saved or had they perished? You could see that they hoped, as we always hope in face of death, that even though hundreds and hundreds had died, their own dear one would still be found alive below the earth. As the days proceeded, however, the number of rescued fell down to nil.

The fire below raged continuously with unabated fury, and no one was allowed to go down the mine. The gates were barred, and we were told that one man, and only one, would go down that afternoon to identify, if possible, the corpses below. His name was Simon Ricq, the miners' delegate. His job was to try identify the bodies and bring up a list of names of those who had definitely perished and who were missing. It was not disguised that his was an extremely dangerous adventure, and Ricq was looked upon as a hero. He was indeed a brave man, and one day did it with one assistant. That assistant was myself. And this is how I managed it.

I made friends with Simon Ricq. He took me out to lunch in a little farmhouse, and I explained that I would like to go down with him. He said that I would not be allowed to accompany him to that hell, and advised me to stay out. After my pleading earnestly, he became sympathetic, and eventually said that the only possible way he could justify taking me down with him was for me to go down in miner's kit and pose as a student of



medicine from the University of—Zurich! Why he picked on Zurich I do not know, but it was not for me to argue. It was understood, therefore, that I was going down to study the values of certain antiseptics and experiment.

I was put in a blue overall, breeches and boots, and given a leather hat, lantern and a pick. We went to the only lift or shaft that was working and descended rapidly—just the two of us.

On reaching the bottom, I heard a roar and saw the fierce glare of the flames; the heat was intense; trolley after trolley just shot down the rails at a high speed, and we had to be very alert to dodge these.

We crawled on hands and feet through the corridors, and I banged my head so often that even my strong leather hat was bashed. Progress was slow and tiring in the extreme.

As we proceeded, we saw figures huddled up against the black walls. The figures of the dead miners looked wild and inhuman. They were jet black and shimmering as if sculptured in coal.

It was terrifying to see these corpses absolutely carbonised.

Just a shred of a shirt would be visible, and into this Ricq would dig with his fingers and fish out a card or a number and write down on his list the name and number, if any. A great many it was impossible to identify.

The attitudes of these poor souls as we found them indicated what must have been their last moments. Two young men sat close together, cheek to cheek, with their arms round each other's necks. Further along a man rested on his elbow,

with one leg high up in the air as if he was trying to keep the ceiling from crashing on him. Further down a man was seen kneeling as if he died while praying. Another had a rosary in his hands, and so on.

For the first time in my life I felt faint, and Ricq quickly produced a flask of ether and milk, which he gave me. This brought me round, and we continued taking down the names. We stayed down there about one and a half hours; we saw about forty bodies and identified only eighteen of them. We were absolutely bathed in perspiration, and as I looked at Ricq's pale face I marvelled at his courage. For he had known them all, and the horror of the scene must have been much more tense for him than for me.

He asked me if I had had enough. I did not dare to say yes, for fear of showing cowardice. I had had more than enough, but I did not want to interfere with his work. He hesitated a moment, and then the air was rent with one of the most tremendous crashes I have ever heard in my life. Away, a hundred yards away from where we were—it could not have been more—a tremendous flame seemed to rise suddenly and some strong current was making it move rapidly in our direction.

The smoke was intense as we groped our way back in search of the way up as quickly as possible. This man Rocq was a marvel. His sang-froid lives with me to this day. I could not move so quickly as he; I was not accustomed to the pits and the mines. It is a very difficult task for a novice to move in normal times, but at this moment it was terrible. One moment I was grabbing out

at something with my hand and dragging my body along ; the next I had to crawl on my stomach across a hole.

He waited for me, although it was necessary for his own safety that he should move as fast as possible ; but he helped me, and eventually we reached the lift, which shot up with us to God's world again.

You may talk glibly to-day of wondrous tonics, elixirs, revivifiers, but that lung full of fresh air as I came out no doctors in the world could ever produce.

We moved towards the gates, and heard the shrieking and yelling of women and children as in heartrending tones they asked if we had found son, father or brother. When it was seen that Ricq had come out without anyone else but me, I heard moans and tears of despair on all sides. Ricq was very patient: he did not answer for awhile, and then moved toward a little office. After a few minutes—it must have seemed years to those waiting—he wrote out some names on a sheet of paper and posted them up.

I will not describe the agonised voices of the people. It can serve no useful purpose ; these can be easily imagined. I was deeply impressed by the curious comfort some of these poor souls derived from the fact that their loved one was found—even dead.

My task, however, was done. I rushed back to the nearest town, which was Lille.

At about six o'clock in the evening, I was sitting in the Café Jean trying to concentrate on how to do justice with my pen to this experience of mine.



MR. EDGAR WALLACE.



It called for a greater pen than mine, and I was at a loss for words.

My old friend, Edgar Wallace, who was also covering the story, came up to me and asked me what I was thinking about. I told him what I had done, and he expressed his amazement.

He said, "You have a very, very big story, and thank God that you are alive." And he wrote for me the introduction to my paragraph to the office, and it ran something like this :

"I have just returned from a scene which is a thousand times worse than death on a battlefield. For in a battlefield one sees the living and the maimed among the dead. Where I was, death reigned supreme. . . ."

It is a curious thing, but Edgar Wallace, who you will remember was the famous War Correspondent for the *Mail* during the Boer War, met me again on this same story a few days later, when the miners rose in revolt and went through the streets of Lens shooting and creating a scene which made every peaceful resident in the village go to his or her home and lock himself in.

I was running along with the crowd of rebels, when Edgar grabbed me by the arm and said : "Where are you going ?" I explained that I was going with the rebels to see what they were going to do, and he pulled me away and said, "Come with me to the top of that building and we can see it from there. What good are you to your employers if you get killed ? They want news from you. If you get shot what good are you to them ?"

There was great sense in what he said, but at that time I did not think of anything except to get the

news first—the thought of danger never occurred to me. One only contemplates danger, I always think, when one has time to think; or in other words, when one is passive. But in action, in a struggle to achieve something big, the zest of the quest makes one move forward on a mighty impulse which is stronger than all the reasoning in the world. Perhaps youth has a great deal to do with it. I wonder if to-day I would be the same. Some years later I read the following in Edgar Wallace's book *People*:

“Another riot in France was caused by the terrible coal disaster at Courrières. There was something like a division of infantry guarding the coal-pits. Riots with the miners occurred every day, and the cause of the trouble was the fact that the French engineers shut down the mines, which were burning, and left the miners to their fate. The correspondents were invited to go down one of the still burning mines, an invitation which I did not feel inclined to accept. Indeed, there was only one correspondent who did go down, and that was Albert de Courville, who was representing a London newspaper. He made the dangerous journey underground, traversing thirty-four millimetres to the galleries, and in his description there were dead men at the bottom of the shaft. I should say that the miners' complaint was justified, for a thousand men were left to their death, and for months afterwards the engineers went about under military protection.”

Now, just one more experience, and this was my last job before I left journalism for good.

It will be remembered one night some years ago one of the Great Eastern Railway Harwich-Hook boats called the "Berlin" dashed itself against the breakwater of the Hook in a blinding snowstorm.

Some of us know the breakwater at the Hook is about a mile long, and that the entrance to the port is very narrow. On this occasion the rough seas and the bad visibility had made it impossible for the captain of that boat to effect an entrance into that narrow opening and he was dashed broadside on to the end of the breakwater, with great loss of life.

No one knew what had happened to the crew and the passengers, except that several of them had been washed ashore drowned.

There was a German Opera Company on board, and quite a crowd in fact, and one can imagine the intense anxiety of everyone as to whether any of the passengers or crew remained alive on board this ship, for the "Berlin" had not sunk and part of the top deck was still above water.

Owing to the tremendous snowstorm and the bad weather it was impossible to do anything in the way of salvage during the whole of the following day.

That evening I was strolling into Carmelite House to fetch something I needed before going to a theatre. It was about seven o'clock, and the columns of the evening papers were full of the wreck—the "Berlin" was a night boat, of course—and it was stated that there would be no boat service to the Hook that night. Mr. Kennedy



Jones, whose name will be remembered as one of the heads of the Harmsworth newspapers, was sitting in the office as I walked in, talking to Mr. Evans. The moment he saw me, he said : "Hullo, De Courville, have you read about the wreck of the 'Berlin' ?" I said I had, of course, and he continued : "I've just learned that the Great Eastern Railway are sending a boat across to-night—the 'Vienna,' with just one or two officials on board. No passengers will be taken, but the Company has allowed us to send one representative over. Would you like to go ?" I quickly said yes, and he went on—"The storm is still raging and the 'Berlin' is lying broadside halfway across the entrance of the Hook, which makes it rather risky." This with a smile.

That same old impulse got hold of me, and although I was in evening dress and only had little more than half an hour to catch the boat train from Liverpool Street, I said I would go.

He asked what money I had on me for expenses, and then produced a five pound note from his pocket, borrowed two or three other pounds in the office, and asked me to get quickly to Liverpool Street station and catch the 8 o'clock boat train.

I only had time to buy a cap before I caught the train ! It was naturally empty. The guard and car attendants were sad, and they told the story of how the previous night the train had been so full of cheerful people who were now probably dead. The few of us there spoke about the chances we had of getting through. I personally looked upon it as a great adventure, although it was pointed out to me the storm was still raging and that the voyage

would be more dangerous to-night than last night, as the already narrow entrance to the Hook was still further reduced by the wreck of the "Berlin." When I boarded the "Vienna," I saw for myself the snowstorm was still raging, and realised that the piloting of the boat into the Hook would be a very difficult job for our skipper in the fog and snow and with the mountainous seas ahead.

A little way out the captain came down and spoke to us. He explained that he was going to make for the harbour at full speed. He did not quite know exactly how much of the ship was within the breakwaters, but he had some idea of its location, and he was going to make for the port on the right. He spoke calmly and lightly of the task ahead, but it was not difficult to see that he looked upon that night's work as very serious.

None of us lay down or rested. We just sat up and talked, the six of us. I was the only newspaper man on board, the rest were officials of the Great Eastern Railway. And there was a doctor.

Suddenly we realised we were about to enter the Hook. We leaned over the side and waited. The tenseness of the moment made us all keep silent. We could hear the engines going at full speed, and we were told that the "Berlin" was somewhere very near us.

All of a sudden we heard moans and cries through the fog and the snow. Women's voices stood out above the rest of the cries, but the voices hardly sounded human.

We knew then, however, that there were still living people on board the "Berlin" and that we were just passing the wreck. That meant that we

were well inside, and all of us heaved a sigh of intense relief.

Once we were in, we hurried round to the captain to congratulate him. It was a wonderfully courageous achievement, and we were very proud of him. We landed in six inches of snow and one of the coldest nights imaginable.

I asked if anyone had been saved, and was told a man clinging to a piece of wreckage had reached land that same day and had been taken to a little hotel, but that every attempt that had been made during the day to reach the "Berlin" had failed.

Early the next morning again tugs and boats set out to try to reach the "Berlin," but every effort failed. It was impossible to get anywhere near the boat, even though the poor terrified living creatures on board shrieked for help. This went on for one day and one night.

All day long newspaper men arrived from all over the world. In fact, I met one from Warsaw and one from Madrid. Through telescopes huddled figures were seen on the deck of this boat—a group of human beings clinging to one another with their arms round each other's waists. Now and then a huge wave would wash right over the boat and hide them all, after which we would see the clinging of those remaining to one another. Those who were left would make frantic efforts to get together again and wait for the next wave to further reduce their number.

It looked hopeless! We sat up all through the following night, hoping for the storm to abate, and boats and men were waiting all the time to set out.

On the second day Prince Hendrik determined

to go out himself and make one last desperate effort to reach the boat and save the people that remained, if any. I was frantic to get the names of any survivors before my colleagues.

I knew that the army of newspaper men and a tremendous number of people who had come into the Hook from Rotterdam and all around would be misinformed as to where the rescued would be taken. This information was valuable, but it was a closely guarded secret and none of us could find out anything. I knew, however, that a certain doctor, who did not seem to like the English very much, was in charge of the arrangements, and I made his acquaintance.

I opened my conversation with him in Italian, which he spoke very well. I could not speak Dutch, and the English he hated.

Although I knew perfectly well that he had refused to see any newspaper men—in fact, he was always in touch with the head of the police, and he disliked intensely the interference of all the army of correspondents that were on the scene—I managed to ingratiate myself with him. I mentioned casually I understood massaging, and when he learned that I was a masseur he agreed to let me know where the survivors would be taken, on condition I would say nothing to anyone.

The place decided on was a little inn outside the Hook, and not one of the main hotels, as everyone thought. After this he confided to me that Prince Hendrik's boat had reached the "Berlin," and they were actually rescuing at that moment some of the passengers or crew who remained.

I did not wait. I rushed down to the men who

worked the semaphores, who confirmed this to me, and quickly to the address he had given me. I went to the first floor of the hotel, and there was the billiard-room, which was being transformed into a hospital by the staff placing mattresses on top of the billiard tables.

On the right of the billiard-room door was a large cupboard. It was situated between the billiard-room and the staircase. I slipped into this cupboard and waited.

I anticipated that hundreds and hundreds of people would learn the "secret" eventually, and would crowd outside this hotel, and I was right. In fact, policemen and soldiers were at last called out to keep the crowd back, and the newspaper men had no opportunity of getting anywhere near. All this happened while I lay in the cupboard.

I waited there for four hours and, needless to say, every bone in my body ached, and I felt most uncomfortable in my cramped position.

All at once I heard a hubbub at the foot of the stairs, and I knew that the crowd waiting had to make way for the survivors. The billiard-room was being prepared at a feverish pace, when a hush fell on everyone, and in deathly silence the tortured forms of those who were rescued were brought up the stairs wrapped in warm blankets. I looked through the keyhole and counted how many were men and how many were women. This was worth knowing, even if I got no further. Then there was a silence on the staircase. The nurses and the officials of the Great Eastern Railway entered the door on my right, and after a while the road was clear.

My time had come. I took off my coat and overcoat, and in my shirt-sleeves walked quickly into the billiard-room. I saw two men massaging the legs of one survivor by standing at the feet and running the hands up and down the calves rapidly. I immediately picked on a youth lying pale-faced on the centre billiard-table and rubbed his legs the way I had seen. As I was doing this, I asked him his name and a whole lot of questions.

The poor fellow gave me all the information I wanted. He came from Notting Hill Gate, he said, and he begged me to send a message to his sweetheart to say that he was all right: to tell her that certain small lozenges she had given him at the station in London were all that he had had in the way of food, and that he had been passing them round to the others with him. How they were all soaked to the skin and expected every next moment to be their last. How a woman and a young child were among those on the lower deck twenty-four hours before, and how they tried to protect this child by clasping arms and getting close together, cheek to cheek, to keep warm. How wave after wave washed over them and reduced their number. How a child was washed overboard and the mother, demented, threw herself after her. . . .

I learned everything that I wanted to know. I passed from one to the other, asked for their names, and I had the whole list while the Great Eastern Railway official in uniform was busy writing down the same information at the other end of the room.

Having done this, I rushed downstairs, and a friend of mine who was on the Central News at that time and who is now holding a very important

position at the head of a newspaper—he will remember this when he reads these lines—came up to me and begged me to give him some particulars.

Every newspaper man on a big job always dreads Reuter's representatives. They have facilities it is almost impossible to combat; even the post offices abroad send their messages through first, even if handed in later than other correspondents' messages. Other news agencies have to be pretty quick to beat Reuter, and as this colleague was a good friend of mine, I told him the exact number of the rescued and some other information. I naturally did not part with the names and interviews of their experiences. I jumped on to a car which belonged to the Editor of a Rotterdam newspaper, and as soon as I reached Rotterdam I rushed the news through to London. I gave the first list of the saved, interviews with each one of them relating their experiences, and other valuable information.

It was a wonderful experience, because I did get my news through first before any agency or any other journalist. The weather was terrible, however, and I had gone through my work without suitable apparel, having left at a moment's notice. The result was that my health had suffered, so I decided to take a long rest.

I am not mentioning these incidents with any conceit or pride. I would only like to give an insight into the workings of a newspaper office, and the seriousness of the work of a reporter on the daily press. Truly, I do not think that there is any calling in the world that so quickly brings a youth face to face with the tragedies and possibilities of human life.

When one picks up a newspaper and glances through the news, it is as well for him or her to remember what it has cost to that paper to keep the public *au courant* with the big news of the day, and what tales of hardships and sacrifices could be told as to how certain big "news" is obtained for a journal.



## CHAPTER III

### THE MESSINA EARTHQUAKE

FORTUNATELY, I was now in a position to take the rest I needed, and I travelled abroad and enjoyed myself for about a year. In fact, I covered practically the whole of Europe and America in that time.

In December, 1908, I visited Sicily. I had been introduced to some rich sulphur mine-owners in Messina, and when I took up my abode at the Hotel Victoria in that city, these friends of mine were very insistent that I should stay with them for a week or two, and so I moved to their house.

It was one of those old-fashioned stone houses with small rooms overlooking a stone cobbled street which was extremely narrow; and in the early morning shepherds would go down with their goats and call at each house and sell goat's milk on the spot.

I passed my first night in this house, and slept in a small room which was put at my disposal.

That night was intolerable. I think now that I should be very thankful for this, but I was not at the time. There were insects in the room which made sleep impossible, and at five in the morning a huge clanging bell from the church opposite

would announce the first Mass, and make a deafening din.

The discomfort was so great, indeed, that despite the overwhelming kindness of my hosts, I decided to pass my nights elsewhere.

I had, of course, to find a suitable excuse and not risk hurting their feelings, for they were charming people. There was a gentleman and his wife, a very beautiful daughter who admired everything English, a brother and a nephew. There were five in the house, which was, in fact, one of the best in the city, though all the buildings were terribly old-fashioned.

The morning after, then, I mentioned that I had to absent myself for a few days, and when they heard that I was leaving they seemed quite distressed. But I was determined to leave, and told them that I had to go to Taormina, which was not very far away, to meet some business acquaintances, and that I would come back to spend Christmas Day with them.

We compromised on this, and with a sigh of relief I took the train, and through endless avenues of orange and lemon groves laden with ripe fruit I made my way to the station of Giardini-Taormina. Hence I went up the mountain-side by horse carriage to the Hotel Timeo.

Here I must say that of all the most beautiful places in the world, Taormina is the most supremely wonderful spot that I have ever seen. Imagine innumerable terraces of flowers, thousands and thousands of trees laden with lemons, oranges and tangerines, perfuming the air with an indescribable fragrance. From four miles above the coastline,

see a perfect sunlit view of the coast of Sicily, with the Channel of Scylla and Charybdis on one side, and the whole coastline from Messina as far as the eye can see to Catania, Girgenti and Syracuse, on the other. Then look up above you, to where, close to you, towers a wonderful snow-peaked mountain, imposing, full of portent. This is the volcano known as Mount Etna, gleaming in the sunshine. Breathe in an air that is cool and invigorating, sunshine that is fierce yet soothed by continuous breezes, and an aroma such as no perfumery has ever produced—and you have some idea of Taormina.

When I opened my window in the morning and the branches of a tree laden with tangerines burst into my room, I felt that here was the haven of rest I had been looking for, and that I should stay there as long as possible. A day or two later I decided to call on my friends, and walked down the mountain-side to the station, there to catch a train for Messina.

I had made friends with the stationmaster, and I now looked for him to have a chat with him. This morning, however, the station was deserted. I asked for him, and a pale-faced young man told me he feared he had died in the earthquake in Messina, and first broke the news to me of this historical disaster.

I had heard nothing of it, and asked for particulars.

He told me there had been a tremendous earthquake and tidal wave in Messina the previous night, that the city was destroyed, and that thousands of the inhabitants had died as a result.

I immediately made my way to the city, and a sight met my eyes which will live with me for all time. The city that I remembered with its huge façade was completely demolished. The tidal wave had smashed down every one of the houses. No longer were there streets, it was just a mass of wrecked masonry heaped high on the ground. The military were parading the streets. Women and men were crying and running anxiously to and fro. Ghouls were being shot down—and I realised that I was face to face with one of the greatest calamities of our age; in fact, with one of the greatest earthquakes of our time.

It was curious that in Taormina, which was not many miles distant, we had not felt the shock; but I was told that the geometrical position of Taormina, perched high on a solid rock foundation, rendered it immune from any seismic shock.

I immediately tried to find my way to the home of my friends, but could not do it. I asked a boy to help me to find the street, and he said he would try, but he did not think it was an easy matter.

I will not describe the horrors of this search for the house. We climbed up heaps of stones and crossed gaping chasms in the earth. Suddenly my guide cried out, "This is the street." The irony of calling it a street was extreme. We ploughed our way through until he stopped and said, "This is your house."

I looked at it.

There were three floors clearly marked on this lean, spare wall that still stood. On the second floor a crucifix still hung to the wall, and I recognised the room I had occupied two nights

before. The bed I slept in used to be situated just below that crucifix. They were all dead. Had I stayed in the home with those unfortunate people, as they so pressingly asked me to do, I would not have been here to-day.

People around me were praying on their knees. Women read their rosaries over what might have been the grave of their dead ones. Tears streamed down the cheeks of nearly everyone I met. Even the military patrolling the streets were visibly affected.

Some months later I again returned to Messina, and at Naples I boarded a boat conveying ex-President Roosevelt of the United States to the scene of the earthquake.

He was a wonderful man, and impressed you as such from the time you met him. I had made his acquaintance at the Excelsior Hotel in Naples, and on the boat several newspaper men gathered round him, and he told us he was about to visit Messina, where the Americans had done a lot of wonderful work, to see if he could help in any way. He spoke to us on all sorts of subjects, political and otherwise ; and I can still see him leaning against the rail and telling us that he had been asked by the Japanese to visit their country and explain certain political conditions to them. He said, however, that though it would have given him great pleasure to have gone, he had no time to spare, and would be unable to accept the invitation. In Messina I was quite close to him and interpreted to the poor men and women who crowded round him the many valuable suggestions he made to the Americans in charge.

## CHAPTER IV

### SIR THOMAS LIPTON

I ALSO returned to Taormina, and it was while I was lunching there one day that a number of yachtsmen arrived.

These consisted of a party from the steam yacht "Erin," belonging to Sir Thomas Lipton, and included Mr. Kennedy Jones, my old chief of the *Daily Mail*, Lord Dewar (then Sir Thomas Dewar) and Morris, of the big firm of Chicago meat packers.

They asked me to join them at lunch, and afterwards we walked through the village and on to the main street.

There was, in this little street, one shop, which sold practically everything, and the party entered because Kennedy Jones wanted to buy a Paris *Daily Mail*.

He asked the storekeeper for it, but the man replied that it was very difficult for him to get sufficient copies of the *Daily Mail*, and he had none left. Loquaciously he explained that he could sell a much larger number to the residents, but that he was always sent less than he asked for, and was therefore compelled to push the sales of the Paris *New York Herald*, who were much more liberal.

Kennedy Jones looked grave, and said this was a very serious matter. He made a note to send off a

telegram about it immediately, for the circulation of the *Daily Mail* could not be neglected in any way.

Thereupon Morris asked what kind of tinned meats the storekeeper kept in his shop? The man replied: "Armour's," which he said were the "very best."

When Morris asked: "Have you none of Morris's?" the man said "No," and that he never could get any. Whereupon Morris said: "Do you think you could sell some if you had?"

He said: "Plenty; any amount of Americans ask for these goods."

Another mental note was made.

Dewar then approached the man and asked him in his well-known Scottish accent: "What kind of whisky have you got?"

The answer was: "Black and White."

"Have you none of Dewar's?"

"Ah!" replied the storekeeper, "De-war's—a beautiful whisky, but the agents I have written and written them and nothing comes."

Dewar was also concerned, and looked quite serious as he made way for Lipton, who asked: "Well, and what kind of tea have you got?"

The storekeeper had by this time begun to really wonder what this party had come in to purchase, and said: "Well, I have the best tea in the world."

Lipton smiled proudly and winked at his friend. "And what tea is that?" he said.

"The United Kingdom Tea Company's tea," the man replied, turning and hastily producing several packets.

Morris, Dewar and Kennedy Jones burst out







KENNEDY JONES, COL., DUNCAN NEILL, SIR THOMAS LIPTON, AND LORD DEWAR.

laughing, but Lipton persisted: "Haven't you Lipton's tea?"

The storekeeper then burst into rhapsodies. "Ah! the famous Lipton's—the greatest tea in the world. The agents in Turin are overdue with their delivery, and I write and I telegraph. Lipton's tea I always can sell, but my delivery is always late!"

Tommy Lipton was gratified, and then I whispered to the storekeeper who the four people were. Directly he learned that they were the heads of the four great concerns, he turned pale with excitement and rushed round the counter after them, talking at a tremendous rate. He explained that if he were given the exclusive agencies he could send up their business 100 per cent. at least. He was wildly excited, and whereas he began by asking for the agency in Sicily only, he finished up by asking to be the representative for the whole of Italy. He produced his books, and as his English failed him, continued in Sicilian dialect.

He gave his card to each one of us, and we eventually left.

That evening telegrams were sent to headquarters by these kings of commerce to put things right. It is needless to say that in Taormina this poor storekeeper could not have sold more than a few pounds a year worth of these gentlemen's goods; but it only goes to show how deeply ingrained in the hearts of these great men were their particular businesses.

During lunch I was invited by Sir Thomas to go on board the "Erin" at Naples and stay as his guest. He was going on to Monaco, and, needless to say, I was glad to accept the invitation.

Within a few days I joined the boat at Naples, and we proceeded to Monte Carlo. It was an interesting trip, for of course the "Erin" was one of the most beautiful yachts in the world.

The boat was bedecked with photographs of Royalty from all over the world, all autographed ; and "Tommy," as he is generally known, was very proud of these pictures. The number of celebrities that I met at that time and subsequently on the "Erin" is too large to mention.

With Lipton one always met the most interesting people in the world. The Empress Eugenie, for instance, was a great friend of his, and she would come up from Farnborough very often and join him. I had the pleasure of meeting her, and she was a beautiful old lady with grey hair and a charm of her own. And then, of course, it is well known how friendly Lipton was with the late King Edward. And he has proudly told me the story of how Princess Ena—now the Queen of Spain—consulted him about her forthcoming marriage with King Alfonso.

I had an interesting insight into the life of this wonderful man. He told me how he started in Glasgow, sleeping behind the counter and earning two and sixpence a week as a grocer's assistant—how he then opened his own shop : how he promised his mother and father that one day they would have their carriage and pair of horses : how they laughed at him : how he blossomed out and opened shop after shop : how at Cambuslang, near Glasgow, he still keeps the house where his father and mother lived in exactly the same condition as when they died, without one thing moved : how the carriage

and pair he promised them were theirs before they died.

Proudly he told me that there was not another "Lipton" in the world. And he was also proud of his efforts to lift the Cup in America, and of the fact that very few of his American friends who came to Europe failed to call on him at his house, known as "Osidge," Southgate, or on the "Erin." He would on those occasions produce all the American flags and bedeck his room with them. He had a real affection for the Americans, and it was wonderful to see millionaire after millionaire paying homage to him; for Lipton has to this day a very good name in America as a great sportsman. He never complained when beaten by an American, and always took his defeats like a man.

One of the men I met on the yacht was Big "Bill Thompson," the Mayor of Chicago, and his wife. He seemed to be quite a nice fellow, and showed no anti-British feeling at that time. On the contrary, he used to say how much he liked our country, especially Scotland, and what a great admirer he was of Harry Lauder.

Lipton has a tremendous sense of humour. He would often say he hoped he would never be honoured with a peerage, for if he had been he would be known as Lord Osidge (the name of his home), and the man in the street would surely call him "Lord Sausage." He is almost a teetotaler. Whenever the whisky-and-soda was passed round, his valet would give him what looked like a very large portion of whisky in his glass, and then, as the soda was offered, Lipton would refuse it. Of course, the impression created

was that he drank large quantities of neat whisky.

Much admiration was expressed at this, but he explained that he only did it to make his friends feel at home. I myself did not understand how he could drink so much whisky, until he confided to me that it was ginger ale in his glass, and that he never touched whisky.

Lipton never gambles. He told me that he had promised his father and mother that he would never touch a card or gamble in any way. When we reached Monte Carlo I naturally went into the Casino and played up a little money on the roulette, and he came in with me. The amounts were quite small, but as the coins were raked in by the merciless croupier, he would look worried, grab me by the arm and take me back to the boat.

Over this week-end we learned of the big "Red Sunday" massacre in Constantinople, and Lipton, who was always in search of adventure, suggested that we should all go right away to Constantinople on the "Erin." The captain pointed out, however, that the week-end at Constantinople might cost him about £1,000 in coal, and we persuaded him to stay at Monte Carlo, where it was much more comfortable.

For although always a generous man, Lipton is not a man to throw his money away. Very frequently he would make comments on the prices of food at various of the Riviera hotels and restaurants de luxe; and he would tell me that in any of his shops he could get better food for ever so much less. On one occasion we had quite an amusing experience. It took place on one of the

most famous hotels on the Riviera. The butter was passed round, and he tasted it and said: "This is not pure butter." I said: "It is impossible in a place of this description they would serve anything else."

He said: "There is 75 per cent. margarine in it."

I laughed at the idea, and he asked me to put a little butter in an envelope and he would send it to London to have it analysed. It was eventually done, and surely enough the report came that there was 75 per cent., as he said, of margarine.

We were very great friends at that time, and there was a rumour about that I was his secretary, but this is entirely false. I never had any position of any kind with Sir Thomas. But I was proud of the fact that I was treated like a good friend and was very frequently with him during this holiday of mine.

I could multiply little anecdotes concerning him indefinitely. On one occasion we motored over from London to Monte Carlo, and the experiences of that trip were extremely amusing. He would take advantage of the daylight by rising very early in the morning and driving till nightfall. In fact, he was so anxious to cover ground during that period that he would drive from sunrise to sunset and would never stop for lunch or food of any kind. His valet, chauffeur and myself resorted to all sorts of stratagems to induce him to do so, as the open air gave us a voracious appetite. The chauffeur, for instance, pointed out once that it was time for us to buy more petrol, and we stopped at a little store near Avignon. While he filled the tank, I bought some chocolate, which I broke up and passed to the

chauffeur and valet, and we munched it during the remainder of the trip. Lipton, who is no fool, saw us munching and asked us what we were chewing. He smelt the chocolate, and said: "If I can go without food, how is it none of you can?" Turning round to the valet and chauffeur, he said: "Albert, isn't the air worth fifty meals?" I thought he was putting an exaggerated value on the air, and told him so. Then he would laugh just as heartily as any of us at the trick we played, and continue driving without a stop.

On another occasion we stopped at an inn for lunch, and when the bill came round we saw that the valet and chauffeur had had coffee and cigars. Lipton looked at the bill, and then sarcastically asked the maid to approach them and ascertain if they would not like some liqueurs as well.

When we made our way out to the car to continue our journey, the maid ran after us with another bill. Lipton said: "What is it?" She said: "This is for the two liqueurs that you offered to the valet and chauffeur, Monsieur."

I need not describe his expression when he learned that what he intended as satire was taken as an invitation and accepted.

On another occasion Lipton and I went to dine at the old Helder Restaurant at Nice, and we had a very enjoyable meal. At the end of the meal, he turned and said: "Now what would you like?"

I said I would like some strawberries. He hesitated a moment before ordering them, and then, as the waiter turned to him, he said: "I will have some cheese, please."

For quite half an hour after that the conver-

sation flagged between us. We walked from the restaurant, up towards the Casino Municipal, and then he took hold of my arm and said quietly : "Albert, you will never be a rich man," and continued : "Why have strawberries in December ? It is not the strawberries—you know on the boat you can have as many strawberries as you like—but strawberries at this time of year are charged at a ridiculous figure, and these people rob you right and left when you order such things." He went on in a kindly, affectionate manner, making this a theme, until I felt quite uncomfortable. He said : "You saw what I had ?—cheese—just as good and half the price." I expressed deep contrition.

He then asked me : "How much did the strawberries cost ? "

"I said : "The strawberries cost eight francs."

"You see," he said, "I enjoyed my cheese just as much as you your strawberries, and they were not even good strawberries. How much did my cheese cost ? "

"Ten francs," I answered.

He gave me a look which I shall remember, and the conversation again flagged until we reached the Casino and the entertainment.



## CHAPTER V

### ADVENTURE IN GUATEMALA

**T**HE roving spirit was very much in me about this time. I wanted to travel and see the world, and shortly after this I decided to go to America.

My American trip and its consequences turned out to be a great deal more interesting than I could have contemplated.

It was, as every first visit to the States must be, a big thrill. I spent a few days in New York, where I saw one of the first Ziegfeld Follies, that is to say, the type of American revue that is making so much money in the United States to-day; and I remember that even at that time—years before my first revue production in London—I decided that here was a new form of entertainment for London. It was so different from the one I had been familiar with in France, viz., the French revue, and I felt that this type of musical show would be a big success in England if only adapted to the English way.

But restless as I have been all my life, I soon left New York and made my way south to New Orleans. Here, in the middle of summer, the heat was intense. I made my way to the St. Charles Hotel, the best hotel in the town, and the mosquitoes

were teeming in millions. But I was very anxious to see the old French quarters of New Orleans and the Creoles that I had heard so much of ; and I was very much amused by the old-fashioned and curious French that they spoke there, and for a few days I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

But while walking about the docks one fine afternoon, I saw the United Fruit Steamers, whose destination was Central and South America. The names of the ports touched by those steamers fascinated me, and having nothing else to do I decided that I would visit Central America. I was not sure whether to make for Southern Mexico, British Honduras, Guatemala, Salvador, Nicaragua, or Panama. Eventually I made up my mind to go to Guatemala. I booked my passage, and a couple of days later left for Puerto Barrios.

It was a wonderful trip through the long and picturesque Mississippi River and then through the Gulf of Mexico. There were not many people on board, but those who were on board did not hesitate to warn me to take precautions against the many diseases that were prevalent in Central America. At that time there was an epidemic of yellow fever, which carried off victims in hundreds ; but I had taken with me good supplies of quinine, and hoped for the best.

I landed at Puerto Barrios, and was questioned by the Guatemalan Customs police, by military officials, and, in fact, by every kind of official. I was searched from head to foot, my trunk was unpacked item by item, and a vigorous search was made for firearms. As the only train of the day for Guatemala City did not leave till the next

morning, I made my way to a café and hotel, to reach which I had to climb up a staircase, as it was poised high up above the ground on long wooden poles. It was explained to me that this was imperative because of the many floods that took place owing to tropical storms. I made my way to the bar and spoke to the owner—a wizened Yankee, who was extremely affable—and in the course of conversation I was calmly informed by two or three of the customers that he had committed a murder in America and had escaped. This was how he was making his living. It was also explained to me that the extradition laws are a little complicated in these Republics, and that I would meet many fugitives from justice in the course of my stay in Central America.

That night, before going to bed, I witnessed a wonderful tropical storm, which even the natives said was one of the greatest ever seen in their country.

The water came down in sheets. It was not a question of drops, but of solid masses, falling and splashing to the accompaniment of flashes of lightning. I have never seen anything like those flashes of lightning; they were continuous and took a hundred different forms. They would linger in the sky for many seconds and assume figures of exquisite beauty. They looked like huge branches of silver coral, and were followed by roar after roar of thunder, with hardly a moment's delay in between. Now and then the deafening explosion of a thunderbolt made us all sit up, while the rain poured and poured. It continued for fully two hours.

When the storm passed, I saw the most beautiful tropical sunset imaginable. To my dying day I shall never forget it. I had never thought that it was possible for even nature to show such amazingly indescribable beauty. I say indescribable, because although the opalescent shades in the sky—from vivid crimson to purple, from purple to red, from red to pink, from pink to turquoise, from turquoise to gold and then blue, with snow-white flakes of clouds in between, all blended together with supreme delicacy—remain vividly in my mind to this day, I have found it impossible to convey in any form whatsoever this wonderful picture. I do a bit of painting, but there are no colours on my palette which I could mix to resemble the colours on that sky; and in several theatrical productions I have failed over and over again with the means at my disposal.

Early the next morning I boarded the train, which took a whole day to reach Guatemala City. We went slowly through valley and hills, seeing wild animals on the way, tropical vegetation, coffee plantations and now and then rare specimens of birds, including the sacred bird of the country—the quetzal, a blue, green and gold bird with marvellous plumage, which the Government consider a crime to kill or to take away from the country. I happen to know this, because I had bought a dead one before leaving and was compelled to smuggle it in the sleeve of my overcoat, thereby taking a great risk. I passed unnoticed, but another man next to me was not so lucky, and was asked many questions and eventually arrested.

Guatemala City is a little Spanish-looking town

with long telegraph poles in the main streets, and shops of all descriptions, mostly stored with haberdashery, fruit and food. There are no hotels such as we understand them in the big cities of the world, although the word "hotel" was freely displayed. I engaged a room in one of the main "hotels." It consisted of a stone-paved entrance to a yard, which was overlooked by four rooms, to one of which I was led by a stout lady, the proprietress, who told me that it was the best she had.

Guatemala City itself, however, was quite interesting. There were bars, shops, trams, just as in any small North American city; but the people themselves were very different from any I had ever seen before. I could not help noticing the soldiers, who went about in some cases with bare feet and clad in ready-made uniforms of blue linen. The people around me would describe them as "volunteers," a term of derision. I learned that whenever the army was short of soldiers, the Government would visit the plantations in the neighbourhood, capture the workers and make soldiers of them. One big coffee planter out there told me that he used to lose some of his men every week, and he would always find them in soldiers' uniforms a few days later. He said to me: "I missed two men this morning," and he added, laughingly, "I know that by to-night they will be volunteers."

The same night that I arrived at Guatemala, I was asked by a grey-haired man in a large sombrero—a North American—if I would like to have a game of roulette. I went out of curiosity, and this American gentleman had a little roulette wheel in a back room, and several people around were gambling.

This gentleman, I learned afterwards, was another one who had very important reasons for not going back to the States. The gambling here was fierce and noisy. It was impossible for me to carry sufficient money on me to do any serious gambling, because when I changed American gold dollars into paper Guatemalan pesos, they would hand me a huge parcel in exchange, which, when I took it home and opened it, I found was full of the filthiest paper currency from one peso upwards. I forget how many thousands of pesos I used to get in exchange for £20. The bank notes run up from an infinitesimal amount, and I did not know where to store this bulky parcel.

I amused myself watching the way the people lived, and I visited a coffee plantation at Quezaltenango. It was very interesting here to see the way the coloured people would climb the trees for cocoanuts, just like monkeys, and the way they would cut down the bananas in huge branches. I saw for myself the condition in which the bananas are sent across, and when I tried to obtain some I found that they were sold at quite a high price, almost the same, in fact, as in Europe or North America.

When I reached my hotel one evening, I found my trunk open, and my clothes on the floor. Nothing had been stolen, but the papers in my attaché case had been gone through and were left strewn about. I was indignant. I went downstairs and spoke to the proprietress. She shrugged her shoulders and said that police agents had come in and made a search. I protested, but she said that was the custom, and I had no right to complain, as

it was done to almost every newcomer. She advised me that I would be fortunate if that was all that happened to me.

I gathered, indeed, from her conversation that I was being watched ; and when I went out I saw behind one of the slim telegraph poles outside the hotel a man with a waxed moustache in a celluloid collar and blue linen suit watching me and ready to follow me. I could not help laughing, because this man was very stout and the pole behind which he was hiding hardly covered his waistcoat buttons. I could see him on either side of the pole, and as he saw me laughing he moved away more to one side in an effort completely to hide himself. This was a forerunner of my adventure out here which began the next day.

On this day I went to a race meeting.

It was while I was in the stand, picking out the winners of the different events, that I was approached by a thick-set, grey-haired man with a large slouch hat. We fell into conversation ; he asked me how long I had been there, and gave me one or two tips for the day's events.

He was extremely nice and I liked his company, so I stayed with him ; and after the races we walked towards the town and introduced ourselves properly to each other. He told me his name was Lee Christmas. He called himself General Lee Christmas. He said that he used to be a driver of a locomotive in Texas, that he had given it up, and that he had been spending several years in Central America, where his business was to promote

revolutions in the various Republics. He was not lying, as I soon found out.

He told me that he had a few days before made an effort to leave Livingstone, a port of Guatemala, in a boat to start a revolution in Honduras, and to put in as President his man, Manuel Bonilla. He said that they had made a good start and that everything had gone right for a time. Their destination had been Puerto Cortez, in Honduras, where they had intended to make a landing. But suddenly the boat had sprung a leak and they all had to turn back. Naturally, they were put under "concentration," which meant arrest without being really arrested. This was done as a safety measure, he explained, so that the Guatemalan authorities should have no trouble with the Honduran Republic. He added that he was very well known in Guatemala City, that they would not dare to touch him, and that he was only waiting for a few days longer, when he would start off again to put Bonilla in the Presidential seat and take Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. When Bonilla was President, he was to establish himself as Chief of Police.

He explained to me how he had been arrested in this very city a couple of years before, because he had had too much to drink and had left a bar and started to amuse himself with a revolver, shooting at all the signs outside the shops as he passed. He said laughingly that the military did not arrest him, but offered courteously to take him to the prison to rest, as he could hardly stand up, he was so drunk. The following morning when he woke up and found he was in prison, he ordered the



governor of the prison to come to him, and he was led out with ceremony.

I expressed my surprise and asked him why they were so frightened of him. He told me that they knew he had a great many followers and that his life was sacred. Were anything to happen to him, there would be many left to avenge him.

He explained to me how firearms were imported by a certain Irishman who specialised in this traffic, for he was well paid for his work.

Lee Christmas also informed me that he had been sentenced to death half a dozen times, and that once when actually facing the firing squad and the soldiers were about to shoot him, he told them that their names were known to his men and that their lives were not worth a centavo if they fired on him. The men, terrified—they were mostly peasants in soliders' uniforms—dropped their guns and fled. The story appeared to me far-fetched and improbable, but Christmas laughingly pointed out the barefoot soldiers, and contemptuously asked what else you could expect from them. "In this country," he said, "any man with a pair of boots is immediately made a general."

He told me that he had had every disease that you could contract in the tropics—every disease except bubonic plague. He had had yellow fever, black-water fever and a great many other fevers that I do not remember. Then he asked me what I was doing there.

I told him that I was a journalist on the staff of a most important English newspaper, and that I also had been requested by my friends, Sir Thomas Lip-ton and Sir Thomas—now Lord Dewar—to see how

their business was progressing in those countries. (Curiously enough I had taken the precaution before leaving England to get my friend Lipton to give me a letter to this effect.)

I added that Lipton and Dewar had asked me to see, during my travels, what chances there were for exporting the goods that they manufactured to Central America.

When Christmas heard these names, he became tremendously interested. He said to me: "Would you like to come along with us? We do not want very much money, but if you come along with us, we are sure to get Bonilla in, and I can get you any position you like—even the portfolio of Minister of Foreign Affairs, if you wish. Or we can accredit you to the Court of St. James's as our representative in London." He then said that he personally always went after the job of Chief of Police, as it was the surest and safest, and he added, with a grin, "I would like to make you a President, but a President has to be a native of his country."

I asked him how many men he had with him and how he worked. He said: "We start with few men. We get a good-sized boat, make for the port or frontier and bombard the "Commandante" of the port when we arrive. We then make overtures to them and buy them over to our side. We then go on to the next city and again buy the army or force them to come with us. In this way we advance like a snowball right down to the capital, where we ask for the surrender of the President. If necessary, we do a bit of shooting, but we have very little trouble by that time, for once we get to the main city we have everybody with us. It is a question

of money, determination and mercilessness to anyone who opposes us."

I was a little bewildered by the conversation, and certainly had no idea of joining these revolutionaries, but so as to create no ill-feeling in the breast of this important gentleman, I promised him that I would consider the matter very seriously.

We went to a bar, and while we were drinking a man with a slouch hat well over his glass eye was standing next to Christmas and drinking. Without turning, Christmas shouted at the top of his voice: "This so-and-so behind is the Chief of Police here. Look at him, what do you think of this guy?"

The man behind him looked as if he had not heard, and as he was the Chief of Police, I for my part thought it wise to declare my admiration for him loud enough for him to hear.

We moved away, and it was arranged that the following day I should go and see Bonilla myself in his hotel, so that he could present me to him as one of his adherents.

By this time, I need hardly say, I was beginning to wonder how advisable it would be for me to stay any longer in this country if I had any respect for my own salvation. I had mapped out my life differently.

I had learned that I was being shadowed more and more owing to my having been seen in the company of Christmas—that no one in the city seemed to know what I was doing there, and that they were all asking what were my business and motives.

In fact, eventually a direct question of this sort

was put to me by a doctor whom I had met on the boat, who warned me to be very careful.

He told me that a certain General D., a Chief of Police and a North American, was right on my track, and that they were taking no chances with the President, whose name was Estrada Cabrera. This gentleman had only gone out once during the past few years. He went out one day in a closed carriage, and had hardly proceeded a hundred yards when a bomb was thrown at him, killing the coachman and the horses, Cabrera barely escaping with his life.

This doctor then advised me to see General D., explain to him who I was, and what I was doing there, and generally put myself right.

Curiously enough, I had an opportunity of seeing him that same day. I was just about to speak to him, when he called me by name, saying: "Señor de Courville, how do you like our country?"

I told him I liked it very much. After making conversation, he asked me if I would like to have some real Scotch scones. I said I would like it very much. He said: "If you will come to my place to-morrow and have some tea—real English tea—I will have some real Scotch scones made for you, and we can have a chat together."

I said I would be glad to do so, and an appointment was made for the following day at his house. I wisely kept away from Christmas in the meantime.

When I arrived at the General's house, he was very affable and received me warmly. He was sitting at his desk and pointed to a seat immediately facing him on the other side of the desk.

He asked me how long I intended to stay there, and what I was doing, and gave me every opportunity of explaining things.

I quickly opened out and told him what I had told Christmas, namely, that I was a newspaper man, that I was writing articles in England about his country with a view to getting foreign capital invested; and then I sagaciously showed him my credentials and the letter from Lipton.

When he saw these names and documents, he sprang up in his seat, closed the box of cigars which lay open before us, put them away, opened another box from a drawer, and said with a wink: "You can smoke these. Make yourself comfortable. But tell me first of all what are you doing with General Lee Christmas?"

I said: "Nothing; he asked me the same questions as yourself, and then proposed I should go with him to Honduras."

He advised me to keep away from him, and said that if I persisted I would endanger my life. Then he laughingly pointed to the first box of cigars and said: "You would have risked smoking these?"

I said: "What is wrong with them?"

He said: "Those are for people we do not like," and put them back in the drawer.

Needless to say, I did not smoke any of his cigars after that admission.

Then he produced a large Luger revolver in a strap which was fixed below his desk just above his knee and pointed directly at where I sat, saying: "We shan't want this now."

He then offered me tea, and I will say that the scones were quite good. After tea he went to a

safe and took out samples of gold quartz, mahogany and rubber. He showed me plans of huge concessions that he could procure for me in Guatemala, which, he said, was the richest country in the world. It was difficult to get any European capital invested in Central America, he pointed out, because of the unstable governments which were always changing, but if I could get capital he could get me anything I wanted on practically my own terms.

He then said he would like to introduce me to the President, and I was told that I could go to see President Cabrera the following day if I liked. He warned me that any papers I wished to refer to in his presence I should hold in my hand and on no account put my hands in my pocket while in his presence, because I would be watched by someone behind the curtain, and if I put my hands in my pocket during the interview I would stand a good chance of being shot on the spot.

I told him that I did not think I was staying very long (in fact, I had made up my mind that very moment to leave the country the next day); but that I would get in touch with him the moment I returned to London. I left the place and went back to my room to pack up my trunk.

That same evening, Christmas called on me and insisted on taking me to see Bonilla. I tried all I knew to avoid this, but there was no chance of refusing him. He became quite angry when I suggested it, so I accompanied him to a little hotel up a small street, and he led the way upstairs to a room with just one bed and a chair, and in this chair was sitting a grey-haired gentleman with café and lait complexion—Manuel Bonilla.

He received me courteously, and not knowing whether I spoke Spanish or not, addressed me in English and then in French. I must say that I have rarely met a more courteous and charming gentleman. I was informed that if I would help him I could have anything I wanted out of Honduras, that he was very popular in that country, and that there would be little doubt of his succeeding to the Presidential chair. He spoke in a quiet, suave voice, and were it not for his sordid surroundings, he might have been addressing me from his chair in the Presidential Palace.

I told him that I would certainly try to help him all I could, and that I would cable to some of my friends in England. Then I took my leave.

The next morning I went to get my passport stamped for a permit to leave the country and catch the train to Puerto Barrios. I found there were great difficulties. The official would not stamp it, and I gathered that he had been told not to. But I bribed him, and I eventually got on the train.

After a day's journey, I arrived at Puerto Barrios again to catch the "Carthago," which was just due that day—the same boat that I had come over on.

Once at Puerto Barrios, I found that the Commandante of the port had received some communication about me, and that I would have to go and show him my passport before leaving. I did not want to do this, and I was fortunate in evading it. I met the Irish captain of this boat, who was very nice to me, and took me straight away on board the ship. Once on this, under the American flag, I had nothing more to fear, and I returned to New Orleans.

As we passed the quarantine station on the Mississippi before entering New Orleans all of us had to line up for the doctor's examination. Thermometers were put in our mouths, and the slightest temperature meant being put in quarantine, because of the Americans' dread of yellow fever. Some of us were so anxious to pass the test that we ate no breakfast that morning to keep our temperatures down.



## CHAPTER VI

### FIRST THEATRICAL VENTURES

**I** THEN went back to New York and from there to England, and on arriving in London I wrote some articles in a humorous vein about my adventures in the *Evening News*.

A few days afterwards I was advised by a native of Guatemala, residing in Liverpool, but in London for some days, that I would do well never to return to his country, because of the spirit in which I had written the articles, which, he said, he would send over, in order to warn them about me.

Within about two months I received a type-written letter signed by the Chief of Police of Honduras—and the signature was “Lee Christmas.” In the letter he informed me that Bonilla was now President, that he was Chief of Police, and that any concessions I wanted in mahogany, rubber, etc., I could have for the asking ; and would I communicate with him immediately as to what I would like him to do for me. He wrote that all had gone well and that his plans “had matured as pre-conceived.”

Once back in England, I had to decide exactly what I was going to do, whether I was going to take up journalism again or not. I realised how difficult it was to get anywhere in the newspaper world. I

looked upon the position of Editor as the great goal of all journalists, but I could not help observing that there were very few of those jobs going, and that they were mostly occupied by men well advanced in years, and with great experience.

I had always had a great liking for the theatre, and I felt that I would like to try something in that direction.

It was about time that the toy shops in London were being stocked with a contrivance known as "Diabolo." It was a game that was just beginning to be the rage over here, and newspapers were mentioning what a difficult game it was, and commenting on its enormous sales. In every park one saw children and grown-ups playing with it.

One day I saw in a French newspaper that at a great contest in Étampes between youths of all ages from ten upwards a young boy had won the "Diabolo" championship. His name was Marcel Meunier. I immediately decided to go over and engage this fellow to come to England, so that I could secure engagements for him on the music halls in England. I could not induce his parents to come over without some definite agreement as to the boy's salary and their expenses being defrayed before they left Paris; so I paid them a sum on account and engaged him, paying for his fare and that of his father and mother as well. Also I guaranteed him so many weeks' engagement, although I was not certain I could contract for any such thing. If I had failed I would have had to pay him everything myself. It was a risk that I took, and it was my first theatrical affair.

On my return to England, I took the precaution

to give this boy all the publicity imaginable. I wrote him up in several newspapers, I had his photograph published in the daily and weekly periodicals, and I described his marvellous skill in detail. I naturally made no mention about my contract with him, but I announced in a newspaper that the boy had accepted a contract at a large salary to come to England and give demonstrations of his marvellous skill in the theatres and music halls.

One night I saw Sir Walter Gibbons, who at that time was running the Holborn Empire, and I asked him if he would like to have the boy whom all the newspapers were talking about to come and give demonstrations of the game that was talked about on all sides. I offered him, in fact, "The Champion Diabolo Player of the World," and after discussing terms he gave me a contract, which I accepted with a sigh of relief. For it not only relieved me of all responsibility, but showed me a good profit.

The newspaper correspondents came to see Meunier : they wrote articles about him, and he became a great celebrity. On the first night of his appearance the theatre was crowded and the large audience was enthusiastic about the tricks the boy performed with his toy. The game was, as I said, new at that time and everyone was learning to play. Engagements for my Diabolo champion came fast and furious.

But after three weeks or so I realised that this was not going to last. From the front of the house, at nearly every performance, somebody would rise and challenge Marcel Meunier for the championship.

The job of the master of ceremonies who introduced him was no sinecure. One or two resigned because they did not quite know how to cope with these insistent and frequent challenges from the front.

We decided eventually to take on all the challenges issued, and announced that on a certain day—I made it as late as possible—Meunier would meet all his competitors.

When the day arrived there were so many competitors that it was almost impossible to cope with them. They all met at a large hall. One by one they came forward, and to my dismay performed the most marvellous tricks with this toy. In fact, my champion himself was almost the poorest player of all. The championship was duly awarded, and I abandoned my “Diabolical” enterprise.

The next proposition that I thought would be successful in a theatre was that of the Sicilian Players coming to London. They had appeared a year or two before at the Shaftesbury Theatre, with the famous Sicilian tragedienne—Mimi Aguglia—and Giovanni Grasso, the greatest of all the Sicilian tragedians. They played, it will be remembered, in Sicilian dialect, and their vehicles were peasant tragedies, which were, to say the least, unrestrained and extremely violent. But they played them with a sincerity and realism that always swept their audience off their feet, even though the curious Sicilian dialect that they spoke was absolutely incomprehensible.

I was associated with Mr. Robert Arthur in bringing these artists to the Lyric Theatre for a season. Their novelty, however, seemed to have worn off, and business was beginning to get very

bad when Grasso suggested that the company should give a performance of "Othello," with himself in the title rôle.

I will admit that the prospect of hearing "Othello" in Sicilian dialect fascinated me. I wondered how Shakespeare came to be translated in Sicilian dialect, and who was the daring author. I was nonplussed. But he was quite serious, and assured me that within a week they would be able to give a perfect performance of Shakespeare's play.

I must here mention that these Sicilian players used to live together in a few rooms—all as part of one large family, becoming godfathers and godmothers to each other's children—and that their excitable temperaments led to a great many rows. This compelled them to move from one hotel to the other in Soho. Violent fights were not infrequent, and it was not an uncommon thing to find different artists playing the same role during the week owing to the fact that the original player had been hurt in some fight the previous night.

In one of their plays the big moment was a scene where two men fought a duel with large knives. I asked them if this was purely a part of the play, but they pointed out that they all carried these large knives in private life, and Grasso put his hand into his hip pocket and produced one.

Grasso was a tower of strength, a man with a marvellous voice and an actor of sterling merit. In fact, he started life by running a Marionette theatre in Catania, in Sicily, and in the course of the work he would handle the puppets and play every part. This made his repertoire enormous, and eventually he formed a company with himself

as protagonist. His success was instantaneous and spread northward to Italy and thence to Paris, London and New York.

I was not present at the first rehearsal of "Othello," but I witnessed the last two rehearsals on the stage. I understood a little of the dialect, and I was amazed at the lines that the artists uttered and the invectives they hurled at each other, although the situations were exactly as Shakespeare intended them to be. The scene between Iago and Othello was extraordinary, if you understood what they were saying. When Othello turned the pages of a large book while Iago was arousing his jealousy, Grasso would smear the whole length of his thumb with his tongue before turning over a page, and the book itself he would hold nine times out of ten upside down. It was very amusing. However, I felt confident that in the choking scene with Desdemona, Grasso would be supreme, and I was right in my surmise. On the opening night, Grasso, in his rage, nearly killed the lady in the bed. The poor lady—Signorina Bragaglia—complained bitterly of his rough treatment. Grasso was very upset. He wept after the show, and the whole company joined in comforting her and him. Grasso admitted that in great moments he forgot himself and was capable of anything.

I dreaded the following morning and picked up the newspapers to read the criticisms with all sorts of misgivings. But the "notices" were really remarkably fine. One critic went so far as to say that Grasso's was the greatest performance of "Othello" since Salvini. Business picked up, therefore, with this play, and I repeated the per-

formances as long as I could, although I always dreaded the choking scene.

The manager of this company was the husband of the leading lady, and a couple of years later he came to me and said he was breaking up the company and going to Algiers. He told me that his wife had left him with his children.

Some time after that, when I engaged Grasso and the company to do excerpts from their plays at the London Hippodrome, this same manager seemed very upset and morose, and I tried to cheer him. But he confided to me that he would never be the same again, that he would not rest until he saw her once more, that he loved her intensely, and that he could never replace her as an actress or as a wife. He said: "I have a feeling that our lives will end in a tragedy." And, curiously enough, this man's prophecy was fulfilled.

Some years later he was attacked by some natives in Algiers, and word was sent to his wife that he was dying. She and the two children boarded a boat to go to him. Then, after a few days out, a wireless message was sent to the boat to the effect that the husband had died, and two days later the boat itself sank, and the mother and children were drowned.

I could not help but think that the tragedies that they had portrayed on the stage were nothing as compared with this.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE HIPPODROME

**H**ERE, then, were my first two theatrical ventures, and by this time I had determined to go on with them.

Through some friends one night I learned that Sir Oswald Stoll was leaving Moss' Empires and that Sir Edward Moss (founder of Moss' Empires and the greatest genius I have ever known in the theatrical business), who was then chairman, had been asked to go back by the shareholders and take charge of the business. He had agreed to go back and take the reins of management, even though he was chairman of the company and had practically retired.

Before I go any further, I would like to say something about Sir Edward Moss. If ever there was a man who had the right to live and be remembered in theatrical history, it was he. He had a sense of the business such as I have never seen in any other man. It was he who created what is known as the music hall, the twice-nightly system with variety, and the circuits. He told me himself how he started, and this is the story.

In Edinburgh one day he read an advertisement in a newspaper. It said that a certain man living some miles out of the town would give away a



piano to the first person who called for it. "Of course," he told me, "everybody thought this was some joke." He felt, however, that he had nothing to risk, and therefore took a barrow and called at the house for the piano. To his delight he found that the advertiser was quite serious in his intention. The man who owned the house had been so tormented by the people around him playing this instrument that he wanted to get rid of it and have some peace. Moss put the piano on the barrow and took it back to Edinburgh, where he took a little hall, sat down at the piano himself and had one or two artists come in and sing songs while he accompanied them. This was the first music hall, as Moss created it. It turned out a big success, and he then elaborated the entertainment with other instruments and artists. He then took another theatre and arranged to give the artists engagements to play at both places. In this way he arranged to give lengthy engagements to each artist he engaged, and within a short time he had promoted quite a number of music halls.

He started the twice-nightly system, and eventually the big circuit known as Moss' Empires was founded and the London Hippodrome built. It will be remembered that it opened as a circus, with water shows of great magnificence. Eventually he found that it was difficult to get novelties with water shows, and as he had to have variety, he closed them down and decided to run the theatre as a music hall. The girders and the tank were untouched, and at any time the theatre could have been converted into a circus again and a water display given should the opportunity have arisen.

I myself had first met Sir Edward Moss at a supper-party at the Savoy Hotel, and in the course of conversation I had explained to him that I would like to go into his business. A little later some influential friends of mine, whom he knew, spoke well of me, and we had since met on several occasions and discussed the theatre at every opportunity.

I now met him again, and to my joy he said: "I shall be taking charge in about six weeks' time: would you like to come with me as my secretary or assistant? If you have any flair for the business, you will have a big chance."

I said that if I was no good, I wanted to know quicker than anyone else.

He pointed out that many of the members of the firm would very likely resent the bringing in of a new man, but that that did not concern him very much.

So one day I found myself seated in his office at Cranbourn Mansions in my official position alongside of Sir Edward Moss. We did not discuss the question of salary, and when one of the directors, Col. James Gillespie, spoke to me at the end of the week and asked what the arrangement was, I told him there was none, and that I would sooner work the first month without any salary. My intention was to serve a sort of apprenticeship, without accepting what I considered the humiliation of a nominal salary as secretary. But Sir Edward would not hear of this, and it was eventually arranged that I should receive a nominal salary from the firm. He made up the difference with his private cheque every week.

His big ambition was to make the Hippodrome

pay. It was losing large sums of money. It was known at that time as the "Moss-Oleum." He was worried because he felt the responsibility of justifying the great faith put in him by the shareholders. He realised that the Coliseum was a much larger theatre, and that they could, therefore, charge half-price and pay a great deal more in salaries for the artists than we could afford. It was important to find big attractions for the Hippodrome, he said. He pointed out how dangerous it was to rely on music hall agents, for he explained to me that they always boosted the artists for whom they worked and no one else. "You rely on their enthusiastic descriptions," he would say, "and when you see the artists they have praised so much, in nine cases out of ten they are nothing and prove no attraction at all in the theatre!"

I expressed my desire to book or engage some artists myself, and suggested that I should go abroad and see what I could find. This suggestion was made during the first few days, and I cannot help thinking as I look back that it was a little impertinent on my part at that particular moment to ask for this show of confidence, as I had no experience whatever of the business and it would have meant my engaging high-priced artists purely on my judgment.

Sir Edward Moss, however, took the suggestion in a characteristic manner. "Certainly: go as soon as you like," he said, "and see what you can find. I hope you realise, however, that if you make any mistakes you will prejudice your position in this firm. You will be putting yourself to the hardest test right at the beginning."

I replied that I was anxious to know right at the outset whether I would be of any use in this business or not, and that I had my own idea, which, rightly or wrongly, I would like to put into play. If he would give me the opportunity, he would soon know whether I was of any value to him. He laughed and said that experience in the theatrical business was of little or no use. New ideas were required all the time.

Through him I learned that the great difficulty of running a music hall was to find fifty-two new attractions a year—that is to say, one big attraction per week per annum. He said in some cases we might find an attraction to last longer than one week, but if we could find big attractions that would last, say, six weeks each, our problem would be materially solved.

I was eager to start immediately, so he sat down and wrote out a cheque on account of my expenses out of his own account, handed it to me, and wished me good luck.

I left the next morning for the Continent with blank contracts signed, and I felt, needless to say, that if I made any mistakes my career would be a short-lived one in this profession. I had always been a gambler, though, and I was determined to ascertain for myself at the earliest possible moment if I had any sense of what the public would like.

I was fortunate in my first engagements. In fact, my first booking was an Oriental dancer—Sahary Djeli. I arranged to present her in my own way. She had a peculiar gift of using her arms and hands in a most fantastic manner. They were supple and loose-jointed, and she would describe curious evolu-

tions with them. I naturally used every endeavour to secure publicity for this attraction by thinking out some kind of a story of interest and writing it out myself in the newspapers. Her "Arm Dance," as I called it, was the big novelty, and this attraction lasted for the six weeks and played to very good business.

To follow her, I engaged a couple of remarkable chimpanzees whom I had seen at the Hamburg Tier Garden. They were called "Max and Moritz," and their quasi-human antics were amazing. They were so much a success that ever since many performing chimpanzees on the music halls have been called by their names.



*All'amico Cristoforo e padre di Zingari*

*A. de Courville*  
*con la più viva simpatia*  
*e amicizia*

*R. Leoncavallo*

*Firenze. 4. 1. 1913.*

## ZINGARI

(Dal poema di PUSKIN).

AUTOGRAPH INSCRIPTION BY  
RUGGERO LEONCAVALLO.

TRANSLATION.

To my very dear friend, the godfather of "Zingari," A. de Courville, with the liveliest sympathy and friendship.

R. LEONCAVALLO.

Florence. 4. 1. 1913.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LEONCAVALLO

**B**UT although I had been successful so far I soon realised that what Moss had said about the difficulty of continually finding big attractions was no myth. It was imperative I should think of something new and, if possible, create some attraction of my own.

One day an idea occurred to me. Everyone who knew music, or who cared for music in any way, knew the score of "Pagliacci." In every restaurant one heard the famous arias from Leoncavallo's opera, and in the theatres and on the concert platform his work was easily recognised. I knew then that it would live long after the popular airs of the day would be dead and forgotten.

I thought that it would be interesting to bring over Leoncavallo, the composer, himself to conduct the orchestra at the Hippodrome, and for us to give performances of "Pagliacci," afternoon and evening, with the *maestro* holding the baton. It seemed a mad idea, but all ideas which are more or less new appear impossible at first sight.

I argued to myself that anyone would be interested to see this famous composer, whose work would go down to posterity; and I decided to leave for Montecatini, in Italy, where Leoncavallo



had his villa, with the idea of making him the proposition.

Montecatini is a famous watering-place in Italy, and Leoncavallo was the idol of this small town. I had no trouble in finding him, and I was ushered into the presence of the famous composer one summer afternoon at his house.

He was short of stature, stoutish, with a massive head, which, in accordance with his name, was very leonine. He received me very affably, invited me to lunch, and when I made my proposal, laughed heartily at the idea of conducting "Pagliacci" at a circus (the Hippodrome). (I may mention, *en passant*, that it always was a difficulty to explain to the various eminent artists I approached that the Hippodrome was not a circus.) In this case Leoncavallo recognised that the scene of "Pagliacci" itself took place in a circus, and the idea tickled him. But I explained at great length that although the theatre was called the Hippodrome, it was in reality one of the finest theatres in London.

I told him that there were many people anxious to see him, and that his music was loved by everyone in England, and I tried everything I knew to make him acquiesce. He raised the question as to how many musicians we had in our orchestra, and explained that the orchestral score to "Pagliacci" called for over sixty musicians. I told him he could have as many as he wished. When I informed him that we gave two performances a day, he looked startled, and said that no opera singer in the world would sing the score of "Pagliacci" twice in one day.

I explained to him that I would arrange for two

separate companies to perform—one in the afternoon and one in the evening, and this seemed to him to solve the problem. I made an appointment with him to meet me in Milan, where his representative had an office, so that we could discuss terms and sign an agreement. Before I left, however, I mentioned to Leoncavallo that I would like him to write the score for an operetta I had in mind. I realised that here was a master of melody, and that his score might be of the greatest value.

Then Leoncavallo smiled, and said: "Do you think that I could write popular airs?"

I said: "Yes, I am certain you could."

He sat down at the piano and played over some of his compositions, and I remember some of the melodies to this day. I reminded him how much money was made out of the "Merry Widow" and how much money Franz Lehar made out of his "Merry Widow" waltz. He asked me to wait while he searched in his library. Soon he produced a neatly bound book replete with his earliest works, and from this he played a piece which I recognised at once as the *motif* of the "Merry Widow" waltz. Although it was treated entirely differently by Lehar, the two strains were almost identical. I do not wish to imply that Lehar had ever even heard of this piece of music, yet here was a curious coincidence—one, by the way, which frequently happens in the musical world.

Leoncavallo made up his mind there and then that he would write a musical play, and I arranged terms with him for this as well.

The famous composer then showed me how he composed his music. It was all new to me, of

course, for I had always imagined that the composers usually picked out the melodies on the piano and then transferred them to paper. Operatic composers, however, apparently worked quite differently. Leoncavallo would take a blank manuscript, write at the commencement of each line the musical instrument in the orchestra, and then he would write down his composition as it would be played by each instrument, and by the time he had finished the piece was fully orchestrated.

We had several chats together, Leoncavallo and I. In the course of one of these I asked him how he came to write "Pagliacci." "The story," he told me, "is more romantic even than the opera."

He told me how he was living in Naples all on his own without any money and working hard in an effort to gain a livelihood. About that time the Italian Government offered a prize for the best one-act opera, and he decided to compete. He could not afford to have anyone to write the book of the opera, so he decided to write it himself. In fact, Leoncavallo wrote all his own libretti. He explained to me that he worked day and night on a story which was the real story of one of the servants in his father's home. The story of "Pagliacci" is, in fact, the real tragedy of this manservant who left him and had to play the clown in a circus to earn his livelihood.

He said to me that one night, feeling hungry and desperate and with a lit candle on his table, he picked up his pen and started to compose his music. He worked till late in the night and only stopped when out of sheer exhaustion he fell asleep.

The next morning when he woke up, he looked through his score and played it over on the piano. He was startled by the poignancy of the famous aria, "Ridi Pagliacci." The heartrending melody of this song he wrote, so he told me, with tears streaming down his checks. "My heart was breaking at the time," he said, and he realised when he played it over on the piano that he had been able to convert his tears into music.

He looked upon this score as a real inspiration, and although he has written other wonderful music, Leoncavallo is not supposed to have ever written anything to equal "Pagliacci." This, at any rate, is the opinion generally expressed in the musical world: although Leoncavallo himself told me that he considered his score of "La Boheme" was even better.

He was very bitter about this other work of his. He explained to me that he had made all arrangements for adapting Murger's book of "La Boheme" to music, and had been working on it for a long time, when Puccini came along with another score of "La Boheme" and had it produced ahead of his. He referred to many of the Italian critics who had an opportunity of comparing both, and he pointed out that they all said that his was the better of the two.

A few weeks later when the *maestro* arrived in London, we fixed him up at a well-known West End hotel. He rehearsed the orchestra, which called for a large number of instrumentalists; and on the opening night, with Leoncavallo at "the top of the bill," the London Hippodrome was "packed."

Needless to say, the Italian colony in London flooded the theatre. I think that during this engagement there must have been a tremendous shortage of waiters in the restaurants.

As the late Mr. Fred Trussell (the manager of the theatre) ushered in the famous composer through the stalls to his seat in the orchestra pit there arose a round of applause and cheering that made one's blood tingle.

The famous score, and in particular the tenor's solo, "Ridi Pagliacci," together with all the other gems of this opera, were played that night just as the composer himself intended them to be played.

It was more than a thrill, it was a weird sensation—one that must live with all those who saw him during this engagement; for now the opportunity will never occur again. Leoncavallo is dead, though his music lives and will live long after we have shuffled off.

## CHAPTER IX

### MASCAGNI

FOR about eight weeks we played to enormous business, but I had already started to wonder with what I could follow this engagement, and at last I decided to go after Puccini, the composer of "La Tosca," "Madam Butterfly," "La Boheme," etc. I approached him in the Savoy Hotel, where he happened to be staying while on a brief visit to London.

Puccini, of whom other Italian composers were very jealous because of his huge success in America, which had brought him a large fortune, was very independent.

I told him that he could have his own terms for conducting "La Boheme."

His answer was that he would not do it—even if I covered him with gold up to here—and he indicated his throat.

He spoke so emphatically that I realised it was no use insisting, so I decided to approach Mascagni, the composer of "Cavalleria Rusticana."

This was the most tiresome mission I have been on in my life. Mascagni was extremely fastidious. He imposed terms on me which were, to say the least, unreasonable. He asked for a fee which was nearly twice that of Leoncavallo. It was a

long, painful uphill task before I got him to sign a contract, and even then I had to agree that I would have seventy musicians, that they would all be approved of by a conductor whom he would specially send over, and that all the artists who were to sing his score were to be approved by himself personally.

I agreed to everything, and one day his representative arrived in London to test the orchestra which was to play at the Hippodrome. First of all two front rows of stalls had to be removed to accommodate all the musicians. The representative then found fault with two musicians, whom we changed, and then he said that he was quite satisfied, and he telegraphed to Mascagni to this effect.

Mascagni arrived with his wife and daughter at the Savoy Hotel. He came up to rehearsal one morning, took up his baton, and while conducting his score found fault with one of the musicians—the player of one of the wind instruments. He tapped the music stand with his stick, stopped the orchestra, pointed out the man to the manager of the theatre, and asked to have him removed. There was a commotion in the orchestra, and the manager tactfully pointed out to him that it would be done before the next rehearsal. He shrugged his shoulders and said it was useless going on with a musician who was wrong.

The following morning we had a visit from a representative of the Artists' and Musicians' Union, who said that this musician was one of the best in England and had played at the Symphony Concerts in the Queen's Hall. I pointed this out to Mascagni,

but he was indignant and would not listen to any excuses. We tried everything we knew, and we asked the man to sit somewhere else. This he did, turning up again at another rehearsal without informing the famous composer and hoping that among the seventy musicians he would play better and pass unnoticed. (I remember I even suggested putting a false beard on him.)

Mascagni picked up his stick, and after about five minutes he again stopped and pointed to the same instrumentalist as before. Things began to look very serious. The other musicians were annoyed. We asked Mascagni to explain to the man where he was wrong. He replied in violent Italian and started to hum the air first as it should be played, and then how the man played it. The difference between the two none of us laymen quite understood. Then he abruptly dismissed the rehearsal and went back to his hotel.

It all began to look extremely ugly, but I was fortunate in that he had a representative who knew him well and was determined to see him fulfil his contract, which amounted to about £2,000 a week. I do not know what domestic affairs they discussed, but shouting was going on in his representative's room at the hotel from ten o'clock one evening to one o'clock in the morning. For three solid hours did they debate as to whether he should conduct or not; and I did not actually know right up to the evening of the *première* if he was going to fulfil his engagement.

It was with intense relief that I saw him ushered into his seat on the opening night. He was accorded the same rapturous reception as Leonca-



vallo, and he stood up by the conductor's chair and started the introduction to his famous opera.

I must give him credit. He was not only a great composer, but he was a great conductor, a wonderful showman. He summoned his instrumentalists with authority, and, in the course of the play, he coaxed and humoured the various players around him like no other leader that I have seen. When it came to the famous *Intermezzo* from "Cavalleria Rusticana" one could have heard the proverbial pin drop in the theatre. It was stupendous. Throughout the engagement I never missed hearing this: the way he had it played was thrilling. In fact, he would work himself up into such a state that he would have to disappear below to change his shirt in the band room after every performance.

I soon realised that the only one-act operas that were popular enough to live in the history of music were the three whose composers I had approached, namely, "Pagliacci," "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "La Boheme," and I had therefore reached the end of my resources in this direction.

I did, however, ask Leoncavallo to write specially for me a new one-act opera on the lines of "Pagliacci." I hoped, perhaps foolishly, that with this inducement he would write another famous one-act opera. He agreed, and so one evening the opera "I Zengari" (Gypsies) was produced for the first time at the London Hippodrome, with the composer in the chair. It was a wonderful score, and one aria in particular rendered by the baritone, entitled "Canto Notturmo" (Song of the Night), "brought down the house." Although in this country it has rarely been heard of since, it is in almost every repertoire in Italy to-day.

## CHAPTER X

### “HULLO, RAGTIME”

**I**T was at about this time that “The Dollar Princess” and “The Girl in the Taxi” were popular musical comedies in London. The composer of these was Leo Fall. As the vogue at the time appeared to be for Viennese operettas, I suggested that I should go over to Vienna and see Leo Fall, and also other eminent Viennese composers, such as Emmerich Kalman and Franz Lehar, to secure one or more of these composers to write specially for us a musical score for a one-act operetta. I proposed to engage some well-known West End artistes and run one of these operettas at the Hippodrome as the principal attraction.

Sir Edward Moss’ reply was: “Certainly, go ahead,” but just as I was about to start it was pointed out to me that a one-act piece by Lehar had been produced at the Hippodrome before I came there, and had been a failure. I still clung to my opinion, however, because I felt that the solution of the Hippodrome problem was to get as far away from running the variety as possible and to specialise in shows.

I left for Vienna, called upon Leo Fall at his house, and put the proposition to him. I asked him if he had any melodies in hand which he could dispose of for this proposition, and made him an offer which was large enough to make it worth his

while. He thereupon sat down and played me tune after tune, from which I selected those I liked best.

We then had lunch, and I remember to this day that lunch, because the caviare was served at the table in a large bowl frappée—we helping ourselves with a soup ladle. I, who had been accustomed to having it served on a teaspoon, as in England, France or anywhere, was, to say the least, surprised; but when I saw that they actually ate the caviare off a large tablespoon I understood the reason for the soup ladle.

Around me, I remember, were several fierce-looking bull-dogs. I asked Fall why he had so many of these. He said: "I like to have them around me because I am so ugly; they are even uglier, and I improve by the comparison." I must admit that he was not exaggerating. He had a typical Teutonic head, shaved close to the cranium, with glasses perched on a large *retroussé* nose. But he was a most charming man. He wrote the whole of the music in a few weeks; the book was prepared and rehearsed; and he came over to London personally to direct a rehearsal. This was the first musical show that was put on the Hippodrome, and it was called "The Eternal Waltz." It was a great success. The leading lady was Clara Evelyn, who had been appearing in some of George Edwardes' musical plays before. Sir Edward Moss was present at the first night of this show, and I still remember his delight at the end of the performance. He was in evening dress, and had to leave the same evening for Edinburgh, where every Christmas he transformed the famous Waverley Market into a fair. (He did this by special licence,

and until the day of his death he kept this up. It was, in fact, his pet scheme.) As he came out from the hall he threw his hat up in the air, and turning round to the late Frank Allen, the managing director of Moss' Empires, he said :

“ There you are ! What did I tell you ? ”

I think it is only right to say here that although Moss had been induced once more to take charge of the business, the compliment paid him by the shareholders asking him to return had made a deep impression on him, and he was very anxious for the London Hippodrome to become a paying proposition. He would frequently look out of the window in our little office and think out schemes for the Hippodrome. “ I wish I could make the Hippodrome pay ”—that was an expression that he used very frequently ; and whenever things improved, as they did continuously at that time, he would show the greatest pleasure, which of course was extremely encouraging to me, as I had been given practically *carte blanche* in the matter.

I need not say that I had quite a struggle to obtain my own ends, although the chairman, Mr. Houlding, was one of the kindest and most courteous men I have ever met, and the help I had from Mr. R. H. Gillespie and his brother “ Jim ” Gillespie was of the greatest assistance. In every move I had to combat a certain amount of prejudice among my associates in the office. This is easily understood in a firm where the employees had waited for years for an opportunity such as I had had, and then found that this chance had been usurped by a newcomer. It was, in fact, to make my position more definite that Moss gave me the title of “ assistant

to managing director." He explained to me that this really meant very little, but it did mean that if he were away the "assistant" would naturally take his place. As he saw the business improve he would absent himself from his office more and more, and he even asked me to use his desk during his absence. He never failed to obtain what he wanted: for he had a great sense of humour and a manner of speaking which was kindly, courteous and yet firm in the extreme. He did not bludgeon and he did not threaten: he just spoke and listened and then spoke again; but it was always a quick decision and a definite one, and everyone who has met him will confirm that he rarely changed his mind once he made it up.

And yet he was more than human. I remember one day his coming to the office in a blue reefer suit with brown shoes and a silk hat, and as he hung up the latter he burst out laughing. "Just imagine," he said to me, "my coming out in this get-up, but I cannot help it: this morning I was the father of a baby."

I congratulated him, of course, and he said wistfully: "I hope I shall live to see her grow up." Poor Moss never did.

I now continued producing these one-act operettas, and the following show was called "Arms and the Girl," with G. P. Huntley in the lead and with Miss Jean Aylwin, the Scotch actress.

Then I told Sir Edward I was afraid I could not keep up this type of thing too long, for although they succeeded in running the necessary six weeks, it was imperative that we should find as quickly as

possible a form of entertainment which would last longer.

I explained to him that I felt that a big spectacular musical show would be the only solution. I suggested first of all a revue, and said that I had my own ideas as to the form of revue to put on; but when he asked me further details, I found it difficult to explain to him exactly what I meant. Nevertheless I suggested that he should go over to Paris and see a show that was playing at the Folies Bergères at that time. I said :

"There is a man there named Flers who has put on quite a good production, but all we want from it is the costumes and some of the scenery." I said that I would construct a show on my own lines, securing the artists and the rest from all over the world. The whole entertainment I would produce on my own lines. At the back of my head I had a combination of a revue which I had seen a few years previously in America, with the French revue, and, of course, a great many features which were not incorporated in either.

Moss went to Paris, and I remember George Graves, the comedian, was with him on that occasion, and I waited impatiently to hear his views when he returned. To my dismay on his return he said that he did not think that the show would be any good in London. I quite agreed with him, and reiterated what I had said on the previous occasion.

He said he had spoken about terms to the man I recommended, and his terms were preposterous. I then told him that it would not be necessary to go to that expense (for now I had a definite plan in my

mind), and that if he would see me through, I was sure I could get just what was wanted. All that was necessary was for me to take a trip to America, make certain engagements, look round for material and artists, and return at Christmastide to put on the revue, which, if successful, I felt would have a long run and save us the trouble of continually finding variety attractions as we had been doing.

Again Moss agreed and arranged for me to go over in the summer. Points were raised in the office as to the advisability of my going over in the middle of summer when all the theatres were closed. But nevertheless I went over, and I believe it was on that trip that I met a young American actress who had just appeared in a show in England and who was busy learning her part in a play which was to be produced in New York on her return. I mean Miss Doris Keane. The play she was reading so assiduously every morning was Edward Sheldon's play, "Romance," which made her famous. She confided in me that the part was that of a Southern Italian girl, that it had to be played with just the right accent. She was afraid that she could not do it because she did not know that accent. I know Italian pretty well, and every day we read through the part together until she acquired the right accent, and in which it will be remembered she made a huge success in New York on her first appearance.

On arrival in New York, I visited the theatres which in the summer provide revues.

It was about this time—1913—that ragtime in music had made its first appearance. I refer to

the days when songs like "Robert E. Lee," "Hitchy Koo" first came out.

The new rhythm fascinated me. It seemed to fit into the atmosphere of revue marvellously, as its tempo was so suitable for chorus work.

I approached Irving Berlin, who was at that time writing songs for a music-publishing firm, and who was appearing with his partner, Ted Snyder, on the vaudeville theatres, singing the songs which his firm published. I also approached Jerome Kern. But I decided in the end to engage Louis Hirsch to compose the music of my first revue. Louis Hirsch wrote some of the most wonderful melodies of his day. He was a young Jewish boy, the son of an Alsatian.

Andre Charlot was in America at the same time as myself, and we were both staying at the Knickerbocker Hotel, which has now disappeared. It was here that I heard of the sensational success of a very beautiful girl—Shirley Kellogg—at the Winter Garden. I went to the theatre and heard her sing "Hullo, New York Town," "The Wedding Glide," and another waltz song, and I made up my mind to engage her at once for England.

I learned that she had made an appointment with my competitor, Mr. Charlot (who was then in charge of the Alhambra), for the following day, so I decided to sign up this artist quickly. It was not easy to come to an arrangement with her, as she did not want to play in revue, but only in musical comedy. So I compromised and gave her a contract for six months to open in musical comedy. But at the back of my head was the intention of putting her, after having opened in musical comedy, in a revue.



I think that it is only right that I should say here that at the time in question I simply entered into this engagement because I felt that she was the best artist in New York for revue work, and for no other reason.

I made several other arrangements and was about to go back to London when one night I was asked by some friends to go to Coney Island, which everyone knows is a tremendous fair with all kinds of amusements, such as scenic railways, "Luna Parks," side shows, covering a tremendous area by the sea of New Brighton beach. I went to Kelly's Cabaret, and there I heard ragtime songs being sung by four young men, who would pick up the refrain from different parts of the hall.

I heard that night a new way of singing a new type of song. These young men were not exactly cultured—they were a rough and ready type of American—but their talent was evident. I then visited other cafés and cabarets on Coney Island, and then I heard other young men doing the same thing. They were, I learned, sent round to these places by song publishers to "boost" or "plug" the songs published by the respective firms. They were known as "song pluggers," that is to say, they would sing these melodies night after night consistently until the people began to know and hum them, and the following day possibly buy a copy of the music.

I asked a number of these young men to come to my hotel the following day, and when they all turned up I never saw such a band of "rough-necks," as they call them in the States, in my life. Fortunately, I had an American agent with me who





MISS ETHEL LEVEY.

spoke to them in their own language, and we picked out the eight best and engaged them to come to England.

What I was going to do with them exactly I did not know at that time, but I felt that they would be useful to popularise and advertise ragtime music before I produced my show.

When I returned, I called a rehearsal for these eight young men. I bought them evening suits, had eight chairs painted in gold, and asked Melville Gideon to accompany them on the piano. The evening dresses and the gold chairs quite upset these songsters, and the first dress rehearsal was far from being a success. But when they did open in the evening, and they sung like they sang on Coney Island those wonderful songs, taking up the refrain in a falsetto or a deep bass voice from different parts of the house, they made one of the biggest successes I have seen in the music hall world. I called them the "American Ragtime Octette," and before long they had many imitators around music halls in the provinces. Leoncavallo, I remember, was very much fascinated by this new rhythm, and I well recall how haunted he was by "Hitchy Koo," which he hummed continuously.

Rehearsals then started for the revue. It became necessary to get a book, comedy scenes, topical songs and musical numbers for the various artists that I had engaged.

I obtained Miss Ethel Levey, who was at that time appearing with a jazz band in a small theatre in Paris, and singing "Alexander's Ragtime Band"—one of the big American successes of the day. I had only one big English artist in the cast, and

that was Mr. Bransby Williams. I asked Max Pemberton, now "Sir Max," the well-known novelist, to collaborate with me, and I worked day and night on this production.

One of the attractions I had booked in my early days at the Hippodrome was a playlet, entitled "Half an Hour," by J. M. Barrie. I had heard that he had written a one-act playlet with this name, and I had been lucky enough to secure it for the Hippodrome, with some of the eminent artists in London. It was through this that I had come into personal touch with Sir James Barrie. He and I met very frequently following on this, and I had the pleasure of having many conversations with this great man. I found him extremely charming and gentle. His quixotic humour, which has made his work immortal, was always to be found at work, and it was because of his geniality that I dared one day to ask him to write a little sketch for me to incorporate in "Hullo, Ragtime." I pointed out to him what it meant to me to have this first big effort of mine a big success, but he answered me with a smile that he could never write unless he had influenza. He told me that, in fact, he did all his writing when he had the 'flu, and that he was not suffering with that ailment at that particular moment.

I tried to coax him to break away from this rule, but it seemed impossible until, a few days later, I saw him in his apartment in Adelphi Terrace. As we sat in his little model kitchen, which is an exact replica of a kitchen in Thrums, he told me that he had an idea. As he spoke he sneezed. I realised then that the 'flu and the idea had come at the same time.

He made one condition. It was that if I did use his sketch I would not mention his name on the programme or make any announcement whatever as to his being the author. I gladly accepted, and he gave me a sketch which he originally intended for Miss Shirley Kellogg. It was called "The Dramatists Get What They Want," and was a satire on the Censor.

It will be remembered that this sketch was eventually played by Miss Ethel Levey; and it was one of the big successes of the show. This is the first time, in fact, that I have revealed who was the author of that sketch, and I hope Sir James will not mind.

Sir James was not the only one I approached for sketches for this entertainment. About this time I decided to ask Miss Marie Corelli to write a playlet for presentation at the Hippodrome, realising that her name—she was then at the zenith of her career—would be a big attraction. I had met her previously with Sir Thomas Lipton at her house at Stratford-on-Avon, and I decided one day to make the suggestion to her.

I succeeded in getting her to write a playlet, entitled "The Sedan Chair." I submitted it to Sir Edward Moss, and his comment after reading it was that it was not very strong, and I was told to ask her to make some alterations. I will never forget the indignation of this lady. She wrote me the most vitriolic letter I have received in my life, and asked me for the immediate return of the sketch. I returned it, and when she met me she explained to me how foolish we were in the theatrical business, and how impossible it was for us to understand the

beauty of what she had written. This conversation took place on the lawn of her house at Stratford-on-Avon. She changed the conversation abruptly, pointed to some sheep grazing around, and said that she always liked to have them there because they "nibbled the grass to an even texture," and so on. She had given up any idea of writing for the stage that day, so it was perfectly useless for me to continue on the subject of her writing anything else.

The time was now drawing very close. In order to fulfil my contract with Miss Shirley Kellogg, which called for her to make her first appearance in England in a musical play, I now put on a one-act operetta for her, called "The Blue House," in which she duly appeared previous to the production of "Hullo, Ragtime."

The music was written by Richard Fall, the youngest brother of Leo Fall, and I recall one big musical hit called "Little Girl." Miss Kellogg made a big personal success throughout.

About this time Sir Edward Moss was very ill. He had to be operated on twice, and was away from the office nearly all the time. I went on with my arrangements, but caused considerable alarm in the office about the expenses I was incurring with my venture. I had been spending several thousand pounds on a show, a thing unheard of in those days, and the late Mr. Frank Allen called on Sir Edward Moss at Folkestone and told him that I was spending a lot of money, that the company could not afford it, it was a very serious matter, and would he please stop it.

Moss told him that I must be allowed to go



MISS SHIRLEY KELLOGG.





through with my arrangements, but that he would send me word to keep the expenses down as much as possible. It was too late now to complain, he said, and if the firm disputed the question of paying the money, he would pay it himself. He then sent me a telegram, in which he informed me that he had given orders that I was not to be interfered with in any way—after which I went to see him.

It was a pathetic interview, and it took place in a nursing home in London. I shall never forget it. He was sitting in a chair with a plate full of radium held up against his stomach. The poor man was suffering with cancer, but did not know it, of course, and he said to me :

“ I had given up all hope at one time, but this time I feel I have a chance, and I hope I shall be spared to see this new show at the Hippodrome. How is it going ? ” . . . etc.

I cheered him up as much as I could, and told him that it was going to be wonderful, and that he would have to be there the opening night, and if it was no good he would have to look for another assistant the following day.

The poor fellow smiled and wished me good luck. “ I shall get into trouble if it is not a success,” he said warningly as I left.

His keen sense of humour never left him even in those agonised hours. He produced a letter he had just received from Scotland asking him to attend an important meeting on his estate “ to decide whether poultry should continue to have free access to the churchyard.”

He said with a laugh : “ You decide that problem.”

As I look back on those days now, I can under-

stand the alarm that I was causing by my actions. Here was a newcomer to the business, without any experience, taking full control of the Hippodrome, spending money, engaging artists and personally rehearsing a production which was nondescript. A "revue" meant very little in those days. I well remember how members of the firm, sitting in the auditorium during my first dress rehearsal, made caustic remarks, such as "He calls it a revue!" "What is it all about?" until, in desperation, I gave orders that if the theatre were not cleared I would not go on with my rehearsal.

And I actually stopped the rehearsal one day until this was done. Afterwards I was appealed to by one of the directors, who promised me that no more comments and criticisms would be made in my presence. I said it was too nervous a strain for me and I would rather be left alone, but that on the first night they could make as many comments as they liked, together with everyone else.

I had staked the whole of my career in the theatre on this production, and I wanted a fair chance, as Sir Edward Moss had promised me.

There is nothing more nerve-racking for a producer than to have anyone watching his rehearsal and coming to decisions as to the merits or otherwise of the show during that time. It is quite impossible for anyone except the producer himself to visualise what he has in his mind—faults that have to be corrected are more evident to him than to anyone else—but the corrections have to be made at the proper time and in accordance with his own ideas.

Slashing cuts have often to me made at the last

moment. The scenic artists may have been given some beautiful and artistic painting, which, directly it is transformed into canvas, wings and borders, looks very different. Certain costumes, which looked so lovely on the plates brought in by the costume designer, look entirely different when put on the chorus girls. In those days we had to open in London without any "try-out" in the provinces, such as managements have to-day. All the alterations which may now be done leisurely while the show is on the road I had to do in the theatre itself before the opening.

I had a wonderful staff at the Hippodrome. They had, and still have, the best stage carpenters in the business. Most important, of course, is the flyman's work. He it is who has to arrange for the lowering and raising of cloths, backings, borders and curtains. It all has to be done in a flash. There is nothing more fatal in a revue than a stage "wait." On a given cue it is essential that every man on that stage does his work with rapidity and precision. Changes of scenery, changes of costumes, all have to be perfectly timed.

All these considerations I had to put into force with a theatre staff which had never done anything of this kind before, having catered for music hall programmes and nothing else.

The orchestral rehearsals, too, were very trying at this time. Syncopated music had to be played in a certain way. I had installed Julian Jones in the chair as orchestra leader. He used to be first violin in the Alhambra orchestra under Byng, and had often deputised for him. I used to insist on the American melodies I had brought over being

played in a certain way, with the proper sense of rhythm and syncopation. I met with all sorts of protests when trying to achieve this object. They told me it was not music.

To keep the balance I had brought over a trap drummer and a cornet-and-trombone player from America. Jones told me that their playing was something quite new and against all principles of music, but nevertheless he agreed with me that syncopated rhythm was effective.

I had one incident before the opening which would have broken the heart of any inexperienced man; but at that time I did not worry very much about anything, and I made a change two or three days before the show which might have been very serious.

The thing arose from a dispute with that well-known artist, Bransby Williams, who was the only Englishman we had in the show and therefore extremely valuable. The others were mostly Americans and artists new to London. One afternoon, Bransby Williams commenced to leave, saying that he had to play in some suburban hall to fill a contract. Rightly or wrongly, I objected to this, and said, no, he would have to rehearse, or if not, then I should have to replace him. He, like all of us, was very nervous and offered to resign his part before the whole company. I accepted, and asked him to put his resignation in writing. When this was done little Willie Solar, a speciality artist, who made quite a success with his droll face and comic whistling, and who to-day earns a very big salary in America, followed up and asked if he could be released too.

It looked at one moment as if the whole crowd was going to resign, which of course would have spelt ruin. Nevertheless I had to show some authority. I said he could go, and asked if there was anyone else who wished to leave. The situation was saved by Miss Ethel Levey and Miss Shirley Kellogg saying: "We are perfectly happy; why should we go? We want to get on with the work." So Willie Solar stayed on, and we proceeded with the rehearsal. I went home that night and altered the manuscript of the show myself so as to eliminate the part assigned to Williams.

## CHAPTER XI

### REVUES

**W**HEN we opened with the "Hullo, Ragtime" revue I had a first night which I shall always remember as one of the big events of my life. In the Royal Box sat Lord Northcliffe, who, knowing that I had been associated with his newspaper at Carmelite House, came to see what I would do in the theatre. I do not think I am exaggerating if I say it was one of the biggest successes that has ever been put on in London. We were sold out for weeks ahead, and the show ran nearly a year, playing twice daily to figures which had never been dreamed of at the Hippodrome. On the first night Lord Northcliffe gave orders that I should have good publicity for this show, and the following morning the *Daily Mail* came out with nearly a column of praise. Before Northcliffe left the theatre on the opening night, he took me aside and said a few words which made me very happy. He said : "When we lost you, de Courville, we lost a good man, but you will do even better here."

After the show that night the usual congratulations, the usual excitement, the usual exultation. I should have been very happy, but I was unhappy instead. A few days before "Hullo, Ragtime"

had opened a telephone message had come to me from Middleton Hall, Edinburgh, in the early hours of the morning, announcing that Sir Edward Moss had died.

I realised what it would have meant to him if he had been present at this show. It truly seemed a cruel trick of fate. His dearest wish had been realised—the Hippodrome had been turned by this success from a serious losing proposition into one of the main theatres in London for spectacular shows—and he was not there to see it. He had missed it by just a few days.

Of course it was a question after this to prepare for other revues to follow. The world was scoured for attractions continuously by me, and I travelled all over the place. It was never a question of being satisfied with what there was: the people came in their thousands, and I thought nothing was too good for them.

Shortly after we had produced "Hullo, Ragtime" London was startled by an announcement that a French airman named Pégoud would give a demonstration in London of flying upside down. One Saturday afternoon he actually did do it for a considerable distance, turning somersaults and performing stunts in the air which thrilled everyone.

We had several of the pioneers of flying coming in regularly to see the show, and among these were Grahame White and Gustave Hamel, who expressed their wonder at Pégoud, and their determination to fly upside down as he did. Hamel, as a matter of fact, did fly upside down over and over again



shortly after that, and so did a great many other Englishman, but Pégoud was the first to do it.

Poor Hamel used to occupy the same seat practically every evening during the show, and he announced to me one evening, while standing by the box office, that he would make an effort to cross the Channel from Ostend to the English coast the following day. At that time this meant a big achievement.

He, it will be remembered, was never heard of again, and all the artists on the stage, from the principals down to the smallest chorus girl, missed his familiar face in the stalls, and although the theatre was full, performed with a heavy heart.

I decided to engage Pégoud to describe to the Hippodrome audiences how he came to fly upside down, and his emotions while so doing, etc. I approached him while he was sitting in the foyer of the Savoy Hotel, asked him if he would come to the Hippodrome the following night, and offered him £100 if he would.

He was a rough sort of fellow—a mechanic—who was not particularly careful with his adjectives when speaking in French. In fact, he spoke in *Argot* rather than French, and he was very amused at my suggestion that he should go on the stage. He said that it would be a much greater sensation than his aeroplane stunt, but he agreed.

I announced it in the papers, and it was arranged that Mr. Fred Trussell, who was then manager and who spoke French fluently, should interpret for him. He was to describe how he came to fly upside down, and his emotions while doing so.

Pégoud's stage appearance that evening was one

of the most amusing incidents in the show. The side of the stage was crowded with a large number of aviators, when Mr. Trussell, in fluent French, introduced the famous aviator to the audience.

There was a rapturous round of applause. Pégoud then started to speak in French, and, with a stick in his hand, described how he turned upside down quite by accident one day. Finding that the machine *could* fly that way, he arranged to be properly strapped and specialised in that kind of flying. This is pretty well all that he said, but the way he said it elicited roars of laughter from those in the front who spoke French, as well as from the "flying" men who stood at the side of the stage. He then expanded on the subject. Everyone was intensely amused at the expression on Trussell's face as Pégoud, using the strongest possible language, spoke on, though they were even less amused by the violent adjectives than by the calm and dignified translation of Mr. Trussell, which was about as unlike the original recital as it could be. In fact, I still laugh as I think of Trussell's futile efforts to whisper to Pégoud not to get quite so excited and moderate his language. At these appeals Pégoud would turn round to Trussell, completely ignoring the audience, and in a typical French manner start to protest and gesticulate, saying that he was doing nothing except tell what he was asked to tell. If, he added, Trussell knew more about it than he, why did they ask him to come up on the stage. Half the audience were in hysterics, because they could see the situation as it really was, and one may easily imagine the roar of laughter that went up when Mr. Trussell, hoping for the best, that is to say,

hoping that very few people had understood what Pégoud had said, advanced solemnly down to the footlights and made a brilliant speech, glorifying the Entente Cordiale and Pégoud's affection for this country. He said so many things that Pégoud had never thought of, that Pégoud himself began to tap him on the arm and ask him why he was talking for such a long time, and what he was saying.

Then Pégoud looked at his watch and said he could not stay there all night, and asked Trussell to wish everyone good night, as he was going.

Trussell afterwards was in a state of coma. He admitted that in thirty years' experience he had never passed through such an evening. As for poor Pégoud, not long after he met his death in an aeroplane. This was not while performing his daring stunts, but during ordinary flying.

I followed "Hullo, Ragtime" with a show called "Hullo, Tango." Tango seemed to be the vogue in Paris and was gradually spreading to London, so I thought that I would keep up the idea of the "Hullo" for the name of the next show.

Ethel Levey had accepted another engagement to follow mine, and in an endeavour to replace her I tried very hard to find another important leading lady. In my efforts to secure the services of a capable person, or perhaps a singer with a big name who would mean something as a box office attraction, I approached Madame Tétrazinni, whom I knew very well.

As a matter of fact, when Tétrazinni first came to London and appeared in "Rigoletto" at Covent Garden to a half empty house and made the biggest

and most sensational success that an opera singer has ever made, I was on very friendly terms with her. Indeed, after that performance itself we went to the Hotel Cecil together—she crying and nervous, fearing that she had failed, and myself reassuring her and bidding her wait until the newspapers came out the next morning, when she would see for herself what an enormous success she had made.

I saw her the next day, and I shall never forget her in her simple little green dress and lace collar asking me to translate all the critics had said. When she realised what it all meant, tears of joy streamed down her cheeks, and she said she would do anything for me, because I had made her so happy. So I decided to approach her and offer her an engagement in my revue.

Of course it seemed a ridiculous proposition to make, for the whole world wanted her at that time, but it is odd how many times an impossible proposition succeeds. And in this case I had nearly induced her to appear in the Hippodrome revue and sing one or two songs, and I am sure I would have succeeded had it not been for her manager. But he was right up against my proposition, and I had to abandon my project.

At this period I made a tour of the provinces and saw several pantomimes.

In these kind of shows a manager can always find an artist of some promise, and in one pantomime I saw a principal boy who looked attractive, had plenty of personality and sang very well. I found, on looking up the programme that

her name was Violet Loraine. I remembered her as having appeared at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in a pantomime some years before, but she had gone to Australia in the meantime.

I engaged Violet Loraine to follow the pantomime, and her original engagement was to sing songs and be ready to replace Miss Kellogg or Miss Levey at any time. She did no comedy work at this period ; in fact, I did not know that she was able to do it. But one day in her dressing-room I heard her entertaining friends with Cockney stories, and I was surprised to find the ability that this wonderful girl had of imitating other artists and of giving impersonations of coster characters.

I decided there and then that I would give her a musical number of that kind, and I had specially written for this purpose a song called "Dear Old Saturday Night." My idea was to show Saturday night in one of the market streets of London, like the Seven Dials or the New Cut. I arranged for Miss Loraine to come on the stage with a barrow, selling fresh whelks, shrimps and oysters in the course of a scene representing a market street in London on a Saturday night.

On a given cue she was to have sung the song "Dear Old Saturday Night." It was a melody of the type that costers dance to on a Bank Holiday at Hampstead Heath.

Violet Loraine was terribly depressed during rehearsals. She did not see herself in this part at all. She wanted to sing nice songs and to play little sketches, but she did not want to do low comedy work. She wept, in fact, the night before opening, but I realised how good she was in it, and



MISS VIOLET LORRAINE.



as kindly as I could I assured her that she would make a big success.

The following night, when the number was put on—it was, I think, in the second edition of “Hullo, Tango”—she “stopped the show,” which means in theatrical parlance that the applause was so great that it was impossible to go on with the entertainment because of the repeated calls she had. Violet was quite touched by this reception, and as she came in front of the curtain for the “umptyeth” time, she saw me standing at the back of the stalls by the cinematograph box, where I used to watch every show. She threw kisses at me, and I knew then that she was happy and convinced. I was very proud, for this song, I always think, was the one that established Violet Loraine as our greatest comedienne.



## CHAPTER XII

### MORE REVUES

ALL this time I was crossing to America every year, to keep in touch with the theatre productions over there, and to make certain engagements.

Most important of these engagements was always that of a dancing instructor for the chorus girls. It was very necessary to have the girls well drilled and trained, but in this country we had made little progress. We still worked on the lines of the old musical plays, with the tall, beautiful show girls nodding their heads in time to the music. What we required for syncopated fox-trots and other musical numbers were entirely new steps and "routine."

One of the first men I brought over in this connection was Ned Wayburn. Wayburn was an interesting character. I had originally obtained him for the production of an operetta called "Are You There?" which came on at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and shortly before "Hullo, Tango" was a dismal failure, despite the fact that the score had been written by Leoncavallo.

His methods were then totally new to London, and he came in for a great deal of severe criticism. He always worked with a grey sweater and a megaphone, he insisted upon the most severe

discipline at rehearsals, and in this particular operetta he attempted to produce every number with effects as if they were revue numbers. To-day this sort of thing causes no surprise, but at that time, coming after the artistic and delicately staged musical comedies and operettas of George Edwardes and other contemporaries, it caused a considerable stir. In fact, on the opening night there was quite an uproar in the theatre. At the end of the performance, there were jeers and shouts from the gallery and pit, and among other invectives hurled on the stage were the words "Mountebank!" and so on.

I was told afterwards that several of the chorus girls who had been dismissed by Wayburn were very angry at his treatment and had organised this demonstration in the gallery. Their determination was evident, for several young men with them were actually seen there with megaphones in their hands. I came out on the stage at the end, very foolishly, to make a speech and try and pacify these noisy individuals. It was unfortunate that I did so, because I could not get in a word, and in the heat of the moment I made a remark which only made things worse.

The papers were full of the incident the next day, and placards with "Ned Wayburn Explains" appeared in the streets. Poor Wayburn had no experience of producing over on this side of the Atlantic, and his authoritative tone on the stage had caused him a great deal of unpleasantness during the rehearsals. On one occasion I remember during a lighting rehearsal, Wayburn asked the electricians for what he called "Magenta No. 9."

He shouted for this colour light several times, until, exasperated, he climbed on to the stage, looked up to the flies and said, "I want Magenta No. 9, and if I don't get it right away, there will be murder here!" He had hardly uttered these words when a steel bolt fell on his head from overhead and he had to be assisted to the stage manager's office.

It is impossible for me to say whether this was an accident or not. It was an extraordinary coincidence, and one can only assume that there was nothing behind it.

The great thing about these American dance instructors is that they sometimes strike an excellent piece of chorus work with new dancing steps, or novel entrances and exits for the girls; and this effort on their part is very often copied by others in the business all over the United States and in the big cities of Europe.

Personally, they always reminded me of drill sergeants. The girls were trained like soldiers, and it was the precision with which they performed certain movements that obtained the biggest applause on opening night. The simplest actions when performed in unison by thirty, forty or one hundred chorus stars have a very telling effect on the stage.

Wayburn to-day has a dancing school in America, and he rehearses hundreds of girls in this school with the idea of training them for engagements in the theatre. In this way he has discovered a great many good acrobatic and other dancers, whom he places in various musical shows without any difficulty. For a manager is always glad to engage a pretty chorus girl who not only knows her work,

but who is able to stand out from a chorus line and do some dancing steps on her own.

He introduces shows on the music halls and picture houses with his best pupils, and the incentive to getting an opportunity of thus starting on the stage has induced many girls to go to his school and take lessons.

When I now brought Wayburn once more to England to produce my new show—"Zig-Zag"—at the Hippodrome, I, in accordance with my usual custom, had the scenes laid out for him on his arrival, and described to him the effects that I wanted in them.

There was one scene in particular which I was keen on, and that was a phantasy entitled "Autumn." I had often been struck with the wondrous beauty of the leaves in the autumn. They have thousands of tints, and their beauty was made evident to me particularly one day when motoring to Newmarket in the middle of October. As I passed the Six-miles Bottom railway crossing and climbed the hill to the racecourse, I saw a scene before my eyes which made me want to reproduce it on the stage as soon as possible.

I asked McCleery, now dead, but then the best scenic artist for landscape painting in this country, to paint a scene representing a corner of a forest in autumn, with a lake in the distance. I asked him particularly to keep away from strong tones and to keep mostly to ochre, because I had in my mind a certain effect that I wished to work in this scene with other colours.

I explained to Wayburn my idea for the

"Autumn" scene. I told him that on the rise of the curtain I wished to have the girls discovered lying down on the ground in costumes made up of masses of leaves. Overhead a leaf or two was to flutter to the ground. The lighting at the opening to be in dark amber, which would develop to a pale straw light for the finish.

Then I wanted one of the girls in the company, of whom I shall tell a certain story later on, to come in and do a whistling solo; and after that, over the little bridge, I wanted the principal to come on and sing a song entitled "When the Autumn Leaves are Falling." In the course of this song, I explained, the leaves on the ground came to life and the girls made an exit. Then different coloured leaves were to be let loose from overhead at given cues by the electricians: beginning with deep russet-coloured leaves, then to brown and to orange, to lemon, and then on to gold; and in the end, with a rain of gold leaves, I wanted a new set of girls to come on clad in costumes of gold leaves.

I always used to explain these things in detail, hoping that they would be carried out as I had mapped them, but it has rarely been my good fortune to fall across anyone who could see eye to eye with me in my own ideas, and always had to do the work myself.

One of the other numbers in "Zig-Zag" was a song which Miss Kellogg sang, in the course of which she was accompanied by show girls holding fishing rods, with a property fish dangling at the end. We had a gangway over the auditorium in those days, and the girls came over the gangway to the stalls and held the fish temptingly out to mem-

bers of the audience. As each one reached to grab it, the girl, by pressing a button in the handle of the rod, would charge the fish with a slight electric current and the holder would receive an electric shock. This I intended should be a musical number of only secondary importance, and worked right down at the footlights. We called such as these "front cloth" numbers, which meant that they were utilised in revue to keep the audience interested while some big change in scenery was being effected on a full stage.

In the case of the Autumn scene, my friend Wayburn had delayed the rehearsal of it so long that the first night of the show was only three days away when I mentioned it to him. He then said that he had an excellent idea—namely, to let the girls with the fishing rods make an entrance over the little bridge in the setting which I had had specially painted for the Autumn scene. He pointed out to me that this would make a pretty background for the girls' entrance.

My feelings may be imagined. Here was a big spectacular idea such as one rarely gets hold of, and just because it meant nothing to him, Wayburn thought he would discourage me and put me off my intention. The fact was that he saw nothing in my scene for his girls to dance to, and did not, in reality, understand what I had at the back of my head.

At six o'clock in the evening, two days before the opening, I decided to take the rehearsals of the whole scene myself. I waited till everyone had left the theatre, and with the aid of the stage staff I arranged for the lighting and the effects of the gradually falling leaves. Then, later in the evening, I rehearsed it all again with the chorus.

It was an inexpensive spectacular scene, but it was mentioned by the critics as being the best thing in the show, which only goes to prove that it is not always the most expensive or most extravagant item in a production that is the best.

I have often been accused of extravagance in connection with my shows, and I have never disputed the question, because I always thought that it was an excellent reputation to have with the public, who like to know they are getting good value for their money. But it would surprise a great many people if I were to tell them how little some of those massive scenes at the Hippodrome and elsewhere really cost. I invariably worked with very few tones in my colour schemes, which meant a uniform type of dress, and I used the lighting to obtain further changes and disguising the main effect, which would only be revealed when the lights came up at the end of the scene.

I mentioned above that a girl came into the Autumn scene and did a whistling solo. This girl was a Miss Marie Spink. Her whistling was extraordinarily good. In fact, Mr. Louis Sterling, the managing director of the Columbia Gramophone Company, informed me that this girl was one of the very few people who could record a whistling solo on the gramophone.

In a previous paragraph I mentioned Louis Sterling, the head of the Columbia Gramophone Company. To-day, when the shares of this company have gone up to twenty times their value, he must often think of the earlier days, when he waged a fierce fight for his company.

In those days he would try to compete with

much stronger competitors, in an endeavour to secure the original artistes of a musical play or revue to record on his instruments.

The managers who helped him had no occasion to regret it.

His manner of showing his gratitude for any little favour he had received was typical of the man. When his business began to grow, during the War, Sterling one day called on the various managers who had shown him a little consideration. In his pocket he had envelopes containing a sum which, I believe, was more than £10,000, and the few people who had helped him shared this figure between them.

Miss Spink was one of my chorus girls and had been working for me for quite a while without me having the slightest idea that she was gifted in this particular way, until one afternoon, between the afternoon and evening shows, I was passing by the Hippodrome stage, and I saw this girl sitting at the piano with several other chorus girls around her.

She was whistling as she accompanied herself on the piano, and I stopped to ascertain who it was that whistled so beautifully. I asked Marie why she had never told me about it, and she laughed and naïvely said that she did not think it would have interested me. I was glad of the opportunity of elaborating the Autumn scene by dressing her up as a bird and bringing her on to do a very difficult whistling solo with trills, etc.

She made a big personal success and subsequently came with me to Paris, when I produced "Zig-Zag" at the Folies Bergères. There she met and married an American officer, and since then has been a happy wife somewhere in Chicago.



## CHAPTER XIII

### PARIS IN WARTIME

IT was during the last year of the War that I decided to produce "Zig-Zag" in Paris at the Folies Bergères. The Folies Bergères' manager—Monsieur Beretta—often came over and saw my shows, and held out inducements for me to send over my revues with an English cast and chorus, and with only a few French artistes.

The romance of Raphael Beretta and Leon Volterra in Paris is extraordinary. Beretta used to be a *chef d'orchestre* of one of the music halls in Paris, and Leon Volterra used to be the interpreter and programme seller at another theatre. These two gentlemen got together during the War, when the theatres were closed—a fact which is not to be marvelled at when one realises that the Germans were only about sixty miles outside Paris. With a few thousand francs which they had saved, however, they had the courage to take over the Olympia and the Folies Bergères, and another theatre; and the moment they opened these theatres they made a lot of money.

It is curious that throughout the whole tragedy of the War there was always room for amusement in Paris. Beretta eventually sold out his share in these theatres, but Leon Volterra took over the

Casino de Paris, where he made a tremendous success of revues run on the English and American lines. He is to-day one of the foremost managers in Paris, and deservedly so.

My cast for "Zig-Zag" included Fred Kitchen, the famous English comic—who spoke a curious kind of French and amused the French amazingly with his Paris accent—and the other artistes in the cast were Miss Shirley Kellogg, Miss Daphne Pollard, George Clarke, Ida Adams, etc. It was the first and, I think, the only English revue production that was ever put on at a theatre in Paris, and it was only made possible by the aid of my good friend, Lord Beaverbrook, who was at that time in charge of the Ministry of Information.

I had tried everything I knew to make it possible to ship over to Paris the scenery and costumes of my revue, and also to take over the company; but I was always laughed at when I made the suggestion. It was dangerous to cross the Channel, the boats were all required for other purposes, and my proposition looked like going by the board, until I approached Lord Beaverbrook at the Ministry of Information.

Lord Beaverbrook's work on this occasion was remarkable. He alone knows what the Ministry of Information meant during the War. When I mentioned my suggestion to him, he immediately realised that this proposition might have far-reaching consequences in the Entente Cordiale, and provide an opportunity for further cementing the close friendship which existed between the French and the English. More than that, he visualised the possibility of all the English Tommies on leave

in Paris having an opportunity of seeing a show from home, and he afforded me every facility for making this venture possible—a fact for which I was extremely grateful.

The show opened triumphantly. The American and the English soldiers crowded into the theatre, and the English company had as much as they could do to get out of the stage door on their way home without being hustled by a host of good-natured Tommies and Dough-boys.

The rehearsals of this revue in Paris were the most trying I ever had. It was at the time of the famous epidemic of Spanish “flu” and several girls were laid up with this complaint, two of them actually dying during the rehearsals.

I also played a part in a rather touching incident at this time. While rehearsing the chorus one day, I saw in the Winter Garden, outside the auditorium of the Folies Bergères, one of the Administrative of the theatre sitting at his desk, with a long line of ladies forming a queue. Each one of them was being questioned by him, and then a card would be produced and handed to one or the other of the applicants.

I did not understand what was happening, and I approached the gentlemen at the desk, telling him that my company was complete and I required no more chorus girls. He told me, with a laugh, that this parade had nothing to do with the chorus, and that it was merely a procedure, preceding every new show, for granting permits for unescorted ladies to the *promenoir* of the theatre! These ladies' permits were renewed as long as there was no complaint against them, and the desperate efforts

on their part to get these valuable cards were pathetic in the extreme.

During the run of this revue at the Folies Bergères the company met a great many celebrities. While lunching at the Café de Paris one day, I was introduced to René Fonck, the French ace, who recently attempted to cross the Atlantic in an aeroplane, his observer being killed in an accident at the start. His amazing record during the War many will remember.

Fonck was a young lad with steady eyes and a keen sense of humour ; and it was always a sign that he had brought down another enemy plane to see him lunching at the Café de Paris, after which he would start off again for the Front.

I asked him how he managed to bring down so many machines, and always without any accident to himself. He explained to me that it was a question of judging the speeds of his and his antagonist's machine when firing from his aeroplane. He said that he rarely aimed at the machine itself, but at a given point which he would quickly calculate. It was clearly more a question of instinct than calculation, however. He gave me an idea of what he meant by throwing up a penny piece and shooting at it in the air. He did this two or three times, and never missed hitting the coin.

The Armistice was declared during the run of the revue. It was during these days that President Wilson came over to Paris. There were a great many eminent newspaper men from America in Paris, whose duty it was to send over reports of the big meetings at Versailles and the peace negotiations. Among these eminent journalists I met

Percy Hammond, who represented the *Chicago Tribune* at that time, and we became close friends. The name of Percy Hammond is one to conjure with in American journalism. He frequently came to the show, and he it was who suggested that I should take a revue of mine to the States, for he suggested that such a show as I staged at the Folies Bergères would be a big success over there. As I mentioned elsewhere, I did eventually take a show to America and was beset by a hundred insuperable obstacles; but Percy Hammond then did something for me that I much appreciated.

When the show—"Pins and Needles"—was produced in New York City under the most atrocious circumstances, he wrote a long article about me in the *New York Herald Tribune*, stating that I should not be judged by this production, which was unlike anything I had ever done on the other side; and he mentioned the show at the Folies Bergères in Paris, going into detail and paying me compliments for it. It was a graceful act on his part, and it was very useful at that particular moment.

I am glad of having this opportunity of thanking him for it.

Another celebrity I met while the revue was running at the Folies Bergères was General Pershing. He came two or three times to see the show, and always saw it from a box.

He was extremely democratic and kind. I made his acquaintance and presented him to the company. Some of the artists were the recipients of valuable *pâté de foie gras*, fresh butter, sugar and all sorts

of delicacies that were scarce during these days as a result of these meetings.

I was staying at the Hotel Meurice with my wife, and one day Sam Gompers, the famous President of the American Federation of Labour for so many years, who is now dead, called upon her.

He said to her that he was a very unhappy man : he had just received some terribly bad news about his wife from America, and he showed her photographs of his home. He apologised for coming to my wife ; but he said that he felt he could talk to an American girl, and that she would understand how unhappy he was. He was a simple man, he said, and all this fuss that was being made over his visit upset him.

He had had interviews with President Poincaré, and he was being followed and watched from morning till night by the Secret Service. He was again meeting the French President that afternoon, and subsequently was to leave for England. It will be remembered that he had a tremendous reception over here, because of his influence over labour throughout the world.

Sam Gompers called again at the hotel after he had seen M. Poincaré, and we had tea together. He showed us pictures of his home and of his family, but he was very unhappy. We did our best to cheer him up, and he said : " I am leaving for England to-night, and I do not even know by what train they are sending me ; but they have told me I was going to-night, and the hour is being kept secret." He said that he would sail for America from an English port.

He was profuse in his thanks before leaving, and

said we made him feel better. When he left we induced him with the greatest difficulty to take with him a bottle of old brandy which he had tasted in our room, and which he liked very much.

Sam Gompers was an Englishman, and I believe was born in Bethnal Green. He told me himself that he was proud of his British birth, and in spite of his huge power in the United States—he had been President of the Federation of Labour for a record number of years—he was still a poor man. He told me, laughingly, that he had had opportunities of being a millionaire many times over, but he was very proud that he still remained a poor man, and he died as such, idolised by the American working classes.

I had an opportunity, years later, of seeing him in New York. And on another occasion, when a show of mine was playing in Washington and I had some trouble with the wardrobe mistress, who, along with the entire staff, appealed to the Federation of Labour, I met him again in amusing circumstances. He settled the matter in a few moments to my satisfaction.

Before I left the Folies Bergères, I had an opportunity of buying the theatre for approximately three million francs. It was with great enthusiasm that I tried to interest my friends in this venture, but I did not succeed. I rarely go to Paris to-day without realising what a big opportunity I have lost in not being able to carry through this deal, because the Folies Bergères has proved a gold mine ever since, and to-day it could not be bought for ten times the amount.

## CHAPTER XIV

### AMERICAN TRIPS

**T**HROUGHOUT the dreadful years of the War, I continued my theatrical activities incessantly. Business was either splendid or dreadful. The air raids, the War news, naturally had their influence on the takings; but generally speaking the good shows thrived and the bad shows did not. It was curious that even at a time of tremendous boom, as the War was supposed to have been for the entertainment industry, there were just as many failures as there are to-day.

I crossed to America regularly every year during the War, and I shall not forget the extraordinary precautions that each liner took to avoid the submarines. On every trip we used to zig-zag across all the way with all lights out—no one was allowed to smoke on deck—we would stand by the gun at the end of the boat, and each one of the passengers would practically keep a look out. On one or two occasions we actually fired that gun at something that looked like a submarine. But I was fortunate. I was never on a ship that was attacked in any way.

On one trip I sailed back from New York with the late Wal Pink, my collaborator in several of my revues and one of the finest men that ever lived.



On this occasion, after paying a visit to America—Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia—we sailed back on the “Baltic” for England. After being at sea for three days, we suddenly came into sight of land, and when we expressed our surprise we were told that we were in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

There had been a raging fire in the town just before we anchored in the port. The passengers soon learned that this was due to the fact that submarines were reported not far from the American coast and that we should all have to stay there for about a week. To say the least, this was a ghastly prospect. None of us, we were told, would be allowed to land, and I tried all I knew to get off this boat to return to New York and sail on some other liner.

It was impossible to leave the ship, I was told, because we had all been passed by the officials of the port, our passports had been stamped at the New York pier and we were destined for England. However, nothing venture, nothing win. I saw the captain, who knew my name, and when I explained to him that it was of vital importance that I should get back to England, he graciously gave me permission to leave the ship on certain conditions.

I was to slip over the side of the boat at nightfall, get ashore, and return to New York immediately. All my belongings were to be left behind in the cabin and I was to take nothing with me. Moreover, I was to inform none of the passengers the fact that I was leaving the ship.

I agreed, and left Pink behind to look after my things. I landed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and that same evening I took a sleeper across to New York

City. It was a Tuesday, and I knew that at mid-day on Wednesday the "New York," one of the American line boats, was leaving. The "New York" was a very old boat belonging to the American line. It was, however, one of the safest boats on the Atlantic, and I crossed on it three times during the War.

When I reached the frontier between Nova Scotia and the States, known as the junction, the official on the Canadian side looked at my passport, asked for my military papers, and as that time conscription was in force for all British subjects, I produced my exemption certificate issued in England. I was curtly informed that this was of no value in Canada, and that I would have to undergo military examination for the Canadian army before leaving the country.

This was a state of affairs that I did not anticipate, and it was only through the American officials on the other side, who were of Italian origin and to whom I appealed in their own language and who entered into heated discussions with their confrères on my behalf, stating that they were to let me in and that they considered my papers quite in order, that I was allowed to proceed.

A gentleman that I had met on the train—a Mr. White, the owner of a "dry goods" store in Boston, and who was very well known to the officials, guaranteed my *bona fide*, and I proceeded to New York, rushed down to Wall Street at the other end of New York City to get my passport re-viséed and only had time to buy myself a large life-saving suit before boarding the "New York."

But I always had a life-saving suit with me. These life-saving suits were marvellous inventions.

They were so constructed that once you got inside and locked yourself in, you could keep perfectly dry and float for any length of time. They also had all kinds of appurtenances for storing food, etc. I was amused recently to see a photograph of Miss Ruth Elder, the American girl who made such a daring effort to fly over the Atlantic, in one of these contrivances.

I arrived in London seven days later and was sitting comfortably in my office when my poor friend Pink sent me a cable, stating he was still in Halifax and that he hoped to leave there within three days. They had been kept there for ten days, but after three days the passengers were allowed to land and visit this cheerless town each day. When, eventually, the "Baltic" arrived off the Irish coast, an alarm was given in the middle of the night and all the passengers had to make for the lifeboats, but, fortunately, it was found to be nothing serious, and the boat proceeded to port.

My first trip to America during the War was on the "Lusitania." On board was Sir Mackay Edgar and a few other English passengers. All lights were out, and we had an uneventful but thrilling voyage. We marvelled at the daring of the Cunard line in sending over such a beautiful boat at such a time; but we were informed that it was heavily insured—this, I may say, did not add to our sense of safety in any way.

The unfortunate "Lusitania," it will be recollected, was eventually sunk by the Germans off the coast of Ireland. I have good reason to remember the incident, for on board the "Lusitania" was

a good friend of mine—the late Charles Frohman, the well-known American manager.

Frohman used on every occasion to bring me over the latest popular songs from America for my revues, and on this occasion, in reply to a wireless which I sent to the boat, welcoming him to our country, he sent me one informing me that he had brought me over a great song—"The Road to Dublin Bay"—for Miss Shirley Kellogg. It can only have been a few hours after sending this wireless that poor Frohman met his death on the road to Dublin Bay, as the song said.

The comic side of these trips, however, was just as strong as the tragic side, although at the time it may not have been very apparent.

It was amusing to note how everyone simulated indifference to the risks that we ran, the passengers discussing quite nonchalantly the possibility of being torpedoed. I shall not forget a great many humorous incidents on these voyages.

One night, in particular, all the passengers wished each other good night (the men especially pooh-poohing the prospect of being sunk and stating bravely they were going straight to bed) and, with lights out, the boat proceeded slowly, when suddenly flashlight signals came from the shore to our boat.

Those of us who had not yet retired to the cabins were quickly on the alert, but with a simulation of stoicism professed not to feel tired just yet and found a pretext for sitting up, by reading books, smoking a cigar or cigarette, playing bridge, and so on. About a dozen of us were sitting by the main staircase, facing the corridor of the cabins. We

were just outside Holyhead on the way to England, and it was considered the most dangerous part of the voyage.

Silence reigned supreme, and one felt (although the majority seemed to be asleep in their cabins) a sense of impending danger. Suddenly, without warning, a door leading to the main deck was opened, and as a strong wind was blowing at the time it closed with a terrific bang.

The effect of this crashing door was to make all the cabin doors all along the corridor fly open, and the passengers, who were supposed to have been soundly asleep in their pyjamas, rushed out fully clad, and with their lifebelts already fitted round their bodies. The sheepish way in which they returned to their cabins when they realised it was a false alarm was worth seeing.

A little while later, amid the intense silence, the few of us sitting up were informed that a submarine had been sighted and that we were in danger of being torpedoed. The effect was intense. Books, cigars, cards, drinks, were all put down. The masks were off, and we waited anxiously for something to happen.

Suddenly an electric bell rang.

It sounded like a thousand bells in the intense silence of that moment.

The chief steward flew up the stairs, shouting at us in a hoarse voice : " That's the captain's bell."

We looked queringly at each other, and all kinds of thoughts passed through our heads. What could the captain want ? What had he seen ? What desperate orders were about to be issued ?

All at once the steward appeared, and began

rushing down the stairway as fast as he could. We all crowded round him anxiously.

"Was that the captain?" we asked.

"Yes."

"What is it? What does he *want*?" This anxiously and quickly.

"A cup of tea," he shot back, and flew down the stairs again.

Oddly enough, I have always had an idea that I would not meet my end on the high seas. I had had some extraordinary experiences in my life when on the water, but nothing had ever happened to me. I had once, however, a very curious escape.

When the "Titanic" was about to start on its maiden trip, I had decided to go on it. I had practically booked my berth and was sitting in the Savoy Hotel one evening, making my final arrangements, when I met a friend of mine. I told him that I was going over on this wonderful new boat, the "Titanic."

My friend looked at me strangely and advised me not to take the boat at any price. "Never," he said, "go on a boat on its maiden voyage."

I replied that every boat on the sea to-day had to have at some time or other a maiden voyage. In reply he asked me how many of them at the bottom of the sea had only had a maiden voyage and no more? This man was interested in a shipping line in Shanghai, China, and he related to me several incidents that in his experience had been associated with the maiden trips of some of his boats.

This friend's tone made a deep impression on me. I was not afraid, but I felt that it was foolish to take the slightest chance without serving some

useful purpose, for I was not in a hurry to go to America. It was a trip that I could easily have delayed a little; and in wanting to be fair with myself, I looked round for an opportunity to postpone my voyage.

It was most adventitious that a few evenings later I was called to the telephone by Sir Edward Moss, who had just returned from abroad. He advised me that he was in town, and said that he would like to see me the following day. I told him that I was going to America on the morrow, but that I would not go if he particularly wanted me. He very kindly said that there was no necessity for me to stay behind, that I could go, that he had only just wanted to ask me how everything was, and that a conversation on the telephone would do.

Bearing in mind what my friend had told me, however, I insisted on seeing him and telling him that I had a great many things to discuss. I grabbed hold of this excuse for not going over on the "Titanic."

The Savoy Hotel porters and staff were duly informed by me that I was not going, and I decided to cross a week or two later.

Three nights after that, at about one o'clock in the morning, the night porter came up to my room. He was very much agitated and informed me that the news had come on the tape machine that the "Titanic" had met with a serious accident. He congratulated me on not having gone. "But," he added, "the report says that no life has been lost."

Then I could not help feeling a deep regret at not having gone and having been a party to such

a wonderful adventure. To have been on board the greatest liner in the world when it met with a serious accident on its maiden voyage was an experience I was extremely sorry to have missed. I suppose that my experiences in Fleet Street made me feel I could have wirelessed over the first report right from the ship.

About an hour later two or three more of the staff came up to me in a great state and imparted the horrible news of the enormous loss of life on this boat. Then I realised that I had indeed been very fortunate not to have been on board, and that I probably owed my life to the warning which my friend had casually given me in the lobby of the Savoy Hotel.



## CHAPTER XV

### EVELYN THAW

ON these American trips one always meets an extraordinary number of interesting people, and I think I may here relate an incident which would certainly never have occurred had it not been for an acquaintanceship struck up in a boat—the “Olympic” in this case.

I was sitting in the restaurant of this one evening, when I was attracted by a very good-looking young lady whose face seemed familiar. I kept on wondering where I had seen her face before, and later in the evening one of the passengers introduced the lady to me as Miss Evelyn Nesbit.

I recognised then that this was Mrs. Evelyn Thaw, the wife of Harry Thaw, who had shot Stanford White some years previously, and whose case will be remembered. She was travelling under the name of Evelyn Nesbit. Harry Thaw was then in Matteawan Asylum, and she had on board with her a little child: Russell Thaw by name.

Evelyn Thaw was entirely different from the kind of girl that I had imagined. She was really beautiful, with a quiet, lady-like demeanour, and a charm that elicited your sympathy right from the very beginning. She confided in me, that first

night, that she had received a wireless from a New York newspaper which read as follows: "Thaw disowns paternity of child. Cable." She asked me in a puzzled and naïve manner what she should answer.

I did not know what to say: it was not for me to ask whether he was the father of the child or not, and it was an awkward moment. At last I suggested, however, that she should send the following reply: "One has only to look at the child to know who was his father." She was delighted with the suggestion, and she wirelessly this reply.

She told me on the boat that she was on her way to Paris to do sculpture work. She was doing this to earn a livelihood, and she had no money whatever.

I asked her if she had ever been on the stage: I knew she had been a dancer a few years before. She said she could dance, but there was no opportunity for her to go on the stage now.

I felt sorry for her, and I asked her if she would like me to help her in this connection. She answered that she would be extremely glad of an opportunity to show what she could do, but that she had no dancing partner.

I engaged her there and then for the Hippodrome at a salary which was not big and was not small. All my American manager friends on board laughed at me. They said that it was a foolish engagement, that the Thaw case was over and forgotten, and that she would not be a box office attraction. Nevertheless, I gave Evelyn Nesbit a contract on the boat.

When we arrived in Paris, she introduced me to

her bosom friend, Miss Teddie Gerard, and there she made a suggestion that I should put Miss Teddie Gerard on the stage in England. I asked Teddie if she could sing, and she said yes. She looked very beautiful, and had had stage experience in New York, so I decided to engage the two of them to come over and play in the Hippodrome. Miss Teddie Gerard was to understudy and play small parts and Miss Evelyn Nesbit to dance.

The question then arose of finding a partner for Evelyn. I approached Maurice, the famous ball-room dancer, who was in Paris at the time, and one or two others ; but they all had their own partners and were not disposed to leave them. I had to continue the search, until at last I found, at the Abbaye de Thélème in Montmartre, Jack Clifford, who was giving exhibitions with another lady. I made my proposition to Clifford, and I had to make it worth his while. He accepted to come over and teach Miss Nesbit a dance or two and appear in the Hippodrome.

It was not easy to stage a dancing number for Evelyn, for she had very little knowledge of stage work, and was too much out of practice to take up dancing again at a moment's notice. Jack Clifford could do nothing, neither could the American dance producer who was working for me at the time. In despair I sent over to Milan for the ballet master from the famous Scala Theatre, and in a week or two this gentleman had staged a very pretty, novel and effective dance.

Before she appeared, I announced in the papers that Evelyn Nesbit would appear at the Hippo-

drome. This caused quite a sensation, and the newspapers gave me a great deal of space about this engagement.

I remember that Hannen Swaffer, at that time on the *Daily Sketch*, gave me a full page in that paper, with a photograph of myself in the middle, and all the engagements that I was contemplating around me in cameos. These consisted of all sorts of sordid criminals and heroes and heroines of *causes célèbres*. One of the engagements which it was suggested I was contemplating was that of a woman singing "Where is my wandering boy to-night?" with a vision in the background of the boy being hanged on the scaffold. It was bitter in the extreme, and in view of these criticisms I retorted that it was extremely cruel to take objection to a poor woman because she had been the victim of a case which had made the world ring. "Why should she be sacrificed?" I asked, "and not be able to earn her livelihood and exploit her talents for the stage?"

I denied that I was exploiting her name, which was an absolute fact. The announcement of the engagement was a bare line or two stating that Miss Evelyn Nesbit and Jack Clifford would appear at the London Hippodrome in the course of the revue.

I insisted, however, on her appearing, but arranged not to state on which night. This was so as to let the audience judge the girl purely on her merits. Also six other girls of a similar type to her and all brunette would appear the same evening in the same revue.

Perhaps, I suggested, the audience would be

applauding Evelyn Nesbit during the evening and not know her identity. It was the only way I could get out of my dilemma. The poor girl was terribly upset. She wept and said that she had been hounded all her life by this terrible case, and was very grateful to me for insisting on her playing, although she would have released me from her contract at any time when she saw the attitude of certain journalists.

She duly appeared at the Hippodrome, and although she was not what we call in our business a "riot," she had a pretty number and was extremely graceful. She also danced very well.

Then a strange thing happened. Two days later the papers were flooded with news that Harry Thaw had escaped from Matteawan. The whole case was reopened, and the American Press hinted that Thaw would be sure to make for her as soon as possible.

The result was that managers from America—the same managers who had laughed at me when I engaged her—were cabling for her terms to sail immediately for New York. I had not forgotten the incident, and I found great delight in making her quote seven hundred pounds as her lowest terms. I believe this figure was actually paid when she appeared at the Hammerstein Theatre in New York.

She sailed for America, and for a long time earned a great deal of money. A year or two ago I learned that she had made an attempt to commit suicide.

While in New York last November I actually met Harry Thaw. He was in evening dress, and a free

man, walking about the foyer of the theatre in which I produced my revue, "The Merry World." He was a very handsome figure of a man, and the people pointed him out in awe or admiration, of which he was quite well aware.

## CHAPTER XVI

### "THE 13TH CHAIR" AND "RAZZLE DAZZLE"

**T**HROUGHOUT all this time, of course, the staging of the revues at the Hippodrome had been an annual affair. I was fortunate enough to have each one of them run the best part of a year. During ten years I put on about ten shows. But Hippodrome revues were far from being my only productions. In fact I had staged other revues at practically every theatre in London. I had produced "Shell Out" at the Comedy: "The Rainbow" and "Here and There" at the Empire: "Cheating Cheaters" at the Strand: "The Show Shop" at the Globe Theatre: "Hotchpotch" at the Duke of York's: "Soldier Boy" at the Apollo: "Smile!" at the Garrick: "Razzle Dazzle" at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane: "The Whirligig" at the Palace: and "The 13th Chair," with Mrs. Patrick Campbell, at the Duke of York's.

"The 13th Chair" and "Razzle Dazzle" were the most interesting to me, the first because of Mrs. Patrick Campbell and the second because it was the biggest revue that was ever put on in this country. (We had as many as three hundred

in the chorus; and it was, I believe, the only revue that was ever staged at the Theatre Royal.)

There are many who think Mrs. Patrick Campbell is the greatest English actress since the time of Mrs. Siddons. This I do not know, but I will say this, that in my time I have never seen an artist with such wonderful personality, such a magnetic voice, and such a supreme sense of the stage as Mrs. Campbell.

It was no easy matter to rehearse the play, as she was of a nervous and impatient temperament and very much opposed to the old-fashioned methods of present-day production. Right at the very outset she informed me that she could not play the leading part in "The 13th Chair" because the part was that of an Irishwoman, and she could not feel herself in that rôle. But if it could be played as a Frenchwoman, she said she would do it.

The part was that of a lady spiritualist, and the murder took place in the course of a séance held by her, and I obtained the author's consent for her to play it as a kind of Madame de Thebes, to which she agreed.

I took the rehearsals in hand myself once I had cast the play, and after a while Mrs. Pat objected to one of the artists in the show. He worried her at every rehearsal. He appeared to be playing the part too slowly for her, and although we tried very hard to get this artist to accelerate, we did not succeed in satisfying our leading lady. For instance, if we asked him to play faster, he would speak in the same slow, measured manner, but would walk rapidly across the stage while delivering his lines.

Things reached a climax a day or two before



opening. I realised that there would be trouble with Mrs. Campbell unless this artist was replaced or something was done. I do not suppose Mrs. Campbell knows the following little story, but I will tell her now, and I know that she will laugh when she reads it; because if there is one thing this wonderful genius has, it is a sense of humour.

Realising what unhappiness the artist in question was causing her by his method, I arranged to stage a piece of strategy. I warned the artist to take no notice of what I was going to do, and if I happened to be angry or forcible to say nothing. I had, I explained, a very important reason for doing what I was going to do. This artist, *en passant*, was really excellent and most competent, and was doing his best.

In the course of the evening, as the rehearsal proceeded, we were approaching a scene during which Mrs. Campbell had always found fault with this artist's rendering. As we reached the psychological moment, and I saw a look on Mrs. Pat's face which eloquently expressed her thoughts, I stopped the rehearsal, and started, in a very angry way, to speak to the gentleman in question. Working myself up into a rage, I asked him to do it the way he was asked to do it, and said I would postpone the show until it was done in that way.

As often happens in the stress of the last rehearsals there was a hush and a look of despair in the eyes of all the others.

I thumped on the brass rail of the orchestra with my fist, and kept up the agitation a little longer, upbraiding him and everyone, until Mrs. Pat at last appeared at the side door of the stage leading

to the auditorium, and in a hushed voice sweetly reassured me that it really was not so bad, that everything would be all right, and that I was not to upset myself, but go to her room and have some oysters.

I had gained a point and the show opened without any trouble. It was a big success, as it deserved to be, for it was the best mystery play of all the mystery plays that have come from across the water since that time. When the company knew of the stratagem later, they all roared with laughter, and the cast was never changed throughout the run.

Most of the spectacular revues with which I have been associated, I am glad to say, made enormous profits, and I could not help smiling when one day I read in the papers one of my competitors reproaching me about my extravagance and the impossibility of making any money out of these productions on the lines on which I produced them, was pointed out.

One colleague of mine, who is a good friend and a well-known theatrical manager to-day, Mr. C. B. Cochran, in the course of an interview said that my “Joyland” cost, he had heard, about £12,000, and that he was putting on a little revue which would cost hardly anything at a small theatre, to show that wit and not spectacular magnificence was necessary. Here was an opportunity, I thought, of pointing out to the public what great value they were getting for their money, and my press agent replied proudly that the show had cost £17,000 and not £12,000. But both his figure and mine were wrong, for the show had cost a whole lot less.

It amused me enormously to read that these big

shows could not make money owing to their big cost of production, for at that particular time I had a show running—"Box of Tricks"—at the Hippodrome, and the balance sheet, which was put before me week after week, would show profits from time to time of as much as £3,000 weekly. My productions at the Hippodrome would be paid off between four and six weeks after the opening date—the rest was all profit.

I was anxious to produce new revues elsewhere and make preparations to this effect; for on all sides around me the success of "Hullo, Ragtime" had made its impression, and my brother managers set about producing this form of revue, namely, a revue without a story, without *compère* and *commères* and with lavish spectacular scenes and effects.

The first big rival I had was the revue "Come Over Here" at the old Hammerstein Opera House, now known as the Stoll Picture Theatre. This show also had met with success, and some big revues sprang up all round me.

It was always important that I should secure some famous comedian who could be relied on to protect the comedy end of the show. For this purpose I had to go to the music halls and secure the greatest personalities at any price. I engaged Harry Tate and Billy Merson, and during these engagements it was necessary to pay so much a week to other managements. Mr. Charles Gulliver and I first met over an arrangement for releasing Billy Merson. He had a great many of these artists under contract for a number of years for the music halls he controlled, and he released them to appear in shows for certain considera-

tions, a courtesy for which I could never thank him enough.

I had been trying at that time to secure George Robey, because I felt that he would make a success in revue, but without any definite result. One day I picked up a newspaper and read to my dismay that he had been engaged for "The Bing Boys" production at the Alhambra. I lost no time in getting my representative to approach Robey before the rehearsals started and make him a proposition to come to me following that production, even at an increased salary.

Robey was very loyal and asked Sir Oswald Stoll if he would be wanted for the revue following "The Bing Boys," as he had a definite proposition at the end of that run. Nothing definite, however, was offered to Robey, and as my proposition was a very good one—as I would have to carry out my contract whether he was a success or a failure in "The Bing Boys" production—I induced him to sign with me for a show to follow the Alhambra production.

Robey opened with Violet Loraine in this revue at the Alhambra, and made one of the biggest successes of his life; and it was very comforting for me to feel that I had him following that show engaged for my next revue. Obviously, had I not taken the risk—if it was a risk—before his appearance, I would have never been able to engage him.

The idea for the other show that so interested me—"Razzle Dazzle"—first arose from a desire to produce a really good revue at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. I felt that this huge theatre, with its wonderful stage, would give me an opportunity of

doing something really finer and bigger than I could do at the Hippodrome. I arranged with Arthur Collins to rent his theatre at a very high figure, and then settled down to production.

It was massively done. We had about three hundred chorus girls, and to rehearse them all it was necessary to have a piano raised on a rostrum on the stage, and for the dancing instructor to keep time with a large pair of wooden clappers from an elevated platform.

The opening scene was a huge banqueting scene with the large chorus sitting high up on elevated rostrums.

Another big spectacular scene was entitled "The Maid of the Mist." It dealt with a legend of the Indians, who sacrificed a girl every year to the Niagara Falls. This occupied the full stage, as did also the finale of the first half, which was entitled "Scotland for Ever."

The setting of this Scottish scene was a rugged mountain-side in Scotland. It opened with a Scottish gillie leading a pony up the mountain-side and on the pony was a little boy in kilts. Then a rugged Scotsman came down to sing a song entitled "Scotland for Ever." During this number I brought down in line formation sets of girls with shields and swords, their kilts representing the tartans of all the clans in Scotland. (I may mention that to secure these special tartans it was necessary for me to have the materials specially woven to represent each particular clan, and that took several months for this to be done.)

Then a band of Scottish pipers came down the mountain-side and with pipes and drum accom-

panied the girls while they performed all kinds of national Scottish dances, including the famous sword dance. It was a massive effect, and I think was perhaps the biggest moment I have ever had in a revue.

The stage was then gradually cleared in military formations, the girls disappearing up the mountain-side and through exits on right and left. The band marched up last, and the stage was clear. With the sound of the pipes faintly heard in the distance, marked with regular beats of the big drum, I brought back the Scotch gillie, the boy and the pony. They returned alone to the huge stage upon which nearly four hundred people had performed evolutions some minutes before ; and as the little child waved his hand to the soldiers in the distance the curtain slowly descended.

The applause which followed was the most intense I have ever heard in any theatre, and afforded me what was perhaps the greatest thrill of my life.

This show, however, was very unfortunate in its rehearsals. We had several accidents, and the rostrums, during one of the rehearsals, broke. The girls were sent hurtling to the ground, but fortunately there was no serious damage.

For this revue I had engaged George Formby, the famous Lancashire comedian—now dead—and I was relying on him to put over the comedy end of " Razzle Dazzle." Formby, however, made no secret of the fact that he was a very sick man and that he was suffering from chest trouble and liable to attacks from time to time, which might incapacitate him. But he was a very brave man, and even made fun of his own complaint by exhibiting out-

side some of the provincial music halls in which he played X-ray photographs of his chest, with the description underneath—"George Formby's inside."

A few days before we opened he fell ill, and at very short notice I was compelled to find some other eminent comedian. Of course, at such short notice, I could not find anyone like him, and I had to manage as best I could.

The overhead expenses of the Theatre Royal were tremendous, and even though we took as much as £1,000 a day on some days, we could not make the revue pay there. So after reducing the whole production considerably, putting Harry Tate in the comedy rôle, we transferred the whole show to the Empire Theatre. This was no easy matter, owing to the different sizes of the respective stages. Nevertheless, we played to packed houses for a long period at the Empire.

One of the artists that I brought to London just about this time was the famous Spanish singer—Raquel Meller. This lady has been heard of considerably in recent years and has been generally acclaimed as one of the world's cleverest singers and *diseuses*.

At the time that I engaged her she had just begun her appearances outside Spain and was appearing in Paris in a music hall. She made a big success, in spite of the fact that she had a very frail and delicate voice. Her dramatic powers—her wonderful, beautiful face—she was pale with luminous black eyes—made her stand out head and shoulders above her competitors. One of the songs she sang was entitled "El Relicario" which was one of the great Spanish melodies of the day and made quite a

furore as a dance tune throughout Europe. She gave a rendering of this song in an entirely original manner.

When I first heard Raquel Meller sing, I was much impressed and I engaged her to come to England at a salary which, I believe, was in the neighbourhood of £150 a week. I had a special setting of crimson velvet, with a large Spanish lantern suspended overhead by gold cords and large gold tassels.

I did everything possible to announce the arrival of this artist, but although after her appearance at the London Hippodrome in one of my revues she was acclaimed as a great performer by the press, she did not draw the large audiences which I had anticipated. As a matter of fact, her songs, rendered with exquisite dramatic finesse, were understood by very few, and, generally speaking, the six weeks' engagement was not a financial success. Her artistic success, however, was never in doubt, and her salary went up to as high as 5,000 francs and more per performance in France.

I was in New York last year, when she made her first appearance. American managers had been fighting to secure this artist for two or three years, but her terms were almost prohibitive and, moreover, she was not very keen on the ocean voyage. It was a feather in the cap of Mr. E. Ray Goetz when he actually got her to sail.

Her debut in New York was sensational. As much as £15 and £20 was paid for a single seat, and the élite of the American "Four Hundred" were present at her opening performance.

As a matter of fact, the "smart" Americans



do not mind what they pay when an internationally famous Parisian artist appears in New York City. They all encouraged the manager—Mr. Goetz—to re-engage her for a return visit. This he did, but by that time the novelty had worn off, and I understand that her second appearance in America had nothing like the success at the first.

The bringing over of big foreign artists has always been a huge gamble in the theatrical profession. One sees a performer in a foreign country scoring a big success night after night, and one is prejudiced in spite of oneself in favour of that performer by reason of the enormous magnetism which he or she is exercising at the moment. And if the performer happens to be a comedy star, it is all the more difficult, because the roars of laughter which he or she provokes in the course of the entertainment become infectious and all sense of discrimination goes by the board. Mannerisms and antics which make thousands of people laugh uproariously, you argue, must obviously have a similar effect on English audiences; but such is not the case by a long way.

## CHAPTER XVII

### METHODS OF PRODUCTION

**I** HAVE often been asked what are the main principles I work upon when producing a big musical show.

It is difficult to reply to these questions, because I have no set method and I have to adapt myself to any kind of production, fitting in my own ideas with the general scheme. The work that a producer has to do is perhaps greater than the ordinary layman realises. By producer I mean the man who assumes the responsibility of staging a play from beginning to end, as I have done, and not a manager, who only engages a great number of people to attend to each department, and then merely supervises the entertainment.

I have in the case of revues always begun by thinking out some spectacular number which would be one of the "high spots." I have in most cases been rather successful with these features, and my name has become associated with spectacular shows because of the song scenes that I specialised in.

I have always believed that every big revue should have at least four big full-stage spectacular effects, and that these effects should be developed in the course of a musical number—with the interpolation

of incidental ballet music or other items, such as speciality dancing—and then revert back to the original melody, which would be played and re-played until it became popular. In this manner I could repeat the strain of an air a great number of times, and unconsciously the audience would become familiar with the tune. So as not to bore them by a continuous repetition, which would become intolerable if something different did not happen on the stage on each repetition, I used always to begin these scenes with a definite set picture and develop it to two or sometimes three or more climaxes. This would be done either by a change in the scenery, in the lighting, or by bringing on new sets of girls in different costumes and groupings. I always utilised certain trick properties or accessories, such as convertible parasols, etc., which the girls would use at a particular moment, and generally work for an ever-changing panorama, the whole scene sometimes lasting as long as eight or ten minutes.

In these scenes it was always necessary to make provision for a team of dancers or a speciality artist of some kind. For instance, when I first bought over the Dolly Sisters from America, it was important that I should arrange for a novel way of introducing these two artists.

In their case I arranged for the stage to represent one lady's huge, untrimmed, black velvet hat shape. As the curtain went up, one saw this bare velvet form occupying the full stage. Slowly the crown of the hat raised itself, discovering in a boudoir interior both Miss Jenny and Miss Rosie Dolly, busy at a make-up table with hand mirrors and all



MISS WINNIE MELVILLE.



the requisites of a lady's toilette. From this they would go into a waltz, and then return to the hat, the crown of which relowered itself.

That was the first effect. Then I brought on an artist to sing a song entitled "Trimming a Hat." The lyric was specially written for the idea, and in the course of the song various sets of girls made their entrances, one after the other. On each refrain, measured out to so many bars of music, each set of girls would take their position around the brim of this hat, in specially designed and constructed dresses, and by reclining on the shape would represent first a lady's sport's hat, then an afternoon hat, then an evening dress hat, and so on. On the most effective picture I would lower the curtain, having repeated the refrain perhaps eight or nine times.

One can easily imagine how boring to an audience it would have been to have repeated a particular tune, consisting of sometimes only sixteen or thirty-two bars of music, so often unless something were happening all the time.

Another very important thing in producing these spectacular effects is to get a leading lady who can hold the audience's attention while you are gradually manœuvring your chorus, scenery, etc., behind her. All your groupings and ensemble effects should always be reached unexpectedly and suddenly, and only be ready for the audience when the artist has finished singing. If the artist is not strong enough to retain the interest of the audience, the eye wanders to the shifting background and anticipates in a great many instances the ultimate effect.

The idea behind a spectacular scene must be definite and have a theme of some kind. I always used to put the most important of my scenes before the interval.

For many years I did not have an interval in the revues I produced at the Hippodrome. I felt that it was unnecessary. I used to start the revue about nine and go right through without a stop till the end. I attribute a great deal of the success of these shows to this fact.

I cannot help feeling even to this day what a trying ordeal it is for an audience to have to wait for several minutes—sometimes ten, sometimes fifteen minutes, as in the case of legitimate plays—while the scenery is changed on the stage.

It is particularly unpleasant for ladies to have to sit in the stalls or elsewhere and wait patiently for the play to recommence. For the men it is not so bad, because they can get up, walk around and smoke a cigarette. The man who invents a form of presenting plays without these intervals, will I feel certain make a big fortune. I attribute a great deal of the success of picture house entertainments to the fact that there are none of these tedious waits.

I cannot help feeling that it is a great pity that the spectacular revue has become almost a thing of the past in London, and is all the more remarkable because it is the only big city in the world where this form of entertainment has almost completely died out. In Berlin, in Paris and in every big city in America huge spectacular productions are the biggest moneymakers in the theatre.

It is, after all, a form of entertainment which

brings out the abilities and particular talents of artists more than any other. Almost all the greatest "discoveries" of recent years have been made in this kind of show. It is, fundamentally, nothing but a modern version of the old-fashioned music hall. In other words, it is a variety entertainment which, instead of making a particular artist come out to perform his "turn" in front of a painted cloth or on a bare stage, provides atmosphere from the moment the curtain goes up, and enhances in every way each appearance of the artist.

Another great thing in favour of revue as a theatrical entertainmant is that it appeals to everybody. The duchess in the stalls and the servant girl in the gallery are equally attracted by it. The question as to whether revues should have a story or not has often been brought up. There are few instances where a story is of any real value. In most cases it is merely a pretext in the first few moments of the show and at the fall of the curtain. And as a means for bringing on all kinds of scenes and *locales* which cannot by the greatest stretch of imagination be made to apply to any particular story it is quite valueless.

I have already mentioned that the revue gave opportunities for discovering artists. One has only to look back in the last few years to think of all the artists that revue has made. Their name is legion. I need only mention Violet Loraine, Ethel Levey, Shirley Kellogg, Gertrude Lawrence, Beatrice Lillie, Jack Buchanan, Billy Merson, Billy Leonard—whom I discovered in a music hall act with a sister and brother—and Maisie



Gay, whom I engaged because she sang a song in a most original manner in "High Jinks," an operetta at the Adelphi Theatre, while eating a meal at a table, and who made a big success with me in an operetta called "Soldier Boy," which I staged at the Apollo Theatre, but who really made her biggest success in the "Whirligig," when she played the part of a charwoman, "Mrs. Harris," in a sketch written by Edgar Wallace. Then there was Anita Elson, whom I brought over from America for another revue; Miss Ivy Tresmand, who appeared with me in "Shell Out" at the Comedy Theatre; Miss Winnie Melville, who scored several merited successes in our revues; Laddie Cliff, who made a big success with his song "Swanee" in "Jig-Saw," and so on.

Speaking of "Soldier Boy," this play was put on during the War, and Edgar Wallace—whom I think I induced for the first time to write for the stage, and who was always one of the best sketch writers I ever had—wrote up the book of "Soldier Boy" for me and interpolated one scene called the "spy scene" in this show, which was one of the funniest moments in any play.

A curious incident had happened during the run of "Soldier Boy" which I would like to mention. Miss Winifred Barnes was playing the leading part of Marlene. The story was briefly that of a soldier who was killed in the War, and when a friend of his went back to inform the mother of the son's death and found that she was blind, he had not the heart to tell her the sad news. In spite of himself, on being acclaimed as the son by the household and with the mother falling on his shoulder delirious



MISS WINIFRED BARNES.



with joy, he felt he had to keep up the illusion and pass for her son.

The sister, Marlene, played by Miss Winifred Barnes, had not seen him for many years, and the story of the play developed in such a manner that the brother and sister, who were, of course, as the audience knew, nothing of the kind, fell in love with each other, until in the course of the waltz theme the leading man passionately kissed Marlene. She then threw him back, screaming: "You are not my brother!" Whereupon he confessed, leaving Marlene heartbroken and miserable on the stage.

It was a poignant moment at the end of the act. The cue for her to make an exit and for the curtain to come down was when the mother from off stage would shout out: "Marlene—Marlene." At the end of the act and in the course of this situation on the opening night, Winifred Barnes was groping along the stage waiting for the cue to make her exit; but no such cue came. For some reason or other the "mother" was not on the stage and nowhere to be found. It was impossible to lower the curtain without the clue, and I, watching the show from a box, was horrified at this extraordinary delay. Suddenly the electrician off stage had the presence of mind to shout out in a deep gruff voice: "Marlene—Marlene." Whereupon Miss Barnes shouted: "Coming, mother," and made her way off stage as the curtain fell.

If ever a stage hand deserved a V.C., it was this electrician, who had the presence of mind to give this cue. The way he explained it was—"I 'ad to get her off, guv'nor, didn't I?"

The difficulty in all revues has always been that of obtaining good comedy sketches.

Although a revue has to be topical, it is curious how little the topical element has entered into revue in this country. In Paris it is different. The revues there run for a short time and any event of the day is treated satirically in the course of the same evening, practically. It is generally done in the course of a topical number with about twenty or thirty verses. Also political questions of the day frequently came in for special treatment. In Paris, also, they have no censorship such as we have in London. The authors and the artists are allowed to mention any well-known names and say whatever they like about them. Over here this is not possible.

Also, the length of the run aimed at by one of the shows in London, if it is to be a success, makes a subject which is topical at the beginning of the run stale within a very short time. I have found it impossible to keep up continuous parodies of the day's events with any measure of success.

But, then, in Paris they have no censorship such as we have in London, and over here it is in the long run necessary to obtain comedy sketches which have domestic situations and deal with incidents in everyday life. These must be short and to the point.

Another resource in revues is to burlesque current successful plays. The burlesque of plays which one sees frequently in this form of entertainment or the intimate type of revue which came and went just like its big brother have also had very short shrift; because unless the potted version of the success was funny to those who had not seen the

play as well as to those who had the burlesque would not be understood by the greater part of the audience.

I remember that while I had one of my shows running at the Hippodrome, I saw one evening a play called "The Land of Promise" at the Duke of York's Theatre. It dealt with life in Canada, and in one strong scene the leading actor savagely ill-treated his wife. I felt that here was a good opportunity for a burlesque.

At supper that night at the back of the menu card I wrote out a little sketch, which I put in rehearsal the following day, and it was played shortly after by Ethel Levey and Billy Merson. The situation was changed. In spite of the bullying and threatening attitude of little Billy Merson, Ethel Levey threw him about all over the stage.

Another sketch which was a big success—with Stanley Lupino in another of my shows called "Jig-Saw"—was one called "The Rest Cure." It concerned a man who had gone into a nursing home for a rest cure and who was visited by people who made the most tactless and stupid remarks. One dear friend, for instance, said on leaving: "Well, I will see you to-morrow, even if you don't see me," and the poor invalid was continuously annoyed by callers of all kinds. This sketch I wrote myself, after a rest in a nursing home in Dorset Square, where practically the same incidents happened to me.

I mention these two particular sketches to show that it is only by the merest fluke that one gets real good comedy scenes without too much talk and with the laughs not dependent on the tag line

at the end or on witty dialogue. Witty dialogue usually only provokes titters and no hearty laughs. The latter only come from low comedy situations, which are the greatest asset of any show.

One of the best sketch writers I knew was Wal Pink. He is now dead. The poor chap was one of the funniest writers for the music halls, and later the revues, that I have ever known. It was he who wrote "Motoring" for Harry Tate, and most of his sketches. He began life by having to play himself in various sketches of which he was the author.

In the early days of the music halls it was necessary for him not only to write his own sketches, but to play in them, and he changed his repertoire sometimes two or three times a week. Pink had a sense of the stage second to none. One had only to describe to him a certain idea and he would put it into a form which was sure-fire for the stage. He had a sense of domestic comedy situations which was uncanny. Domestic episodes were his speciality, and he would explain to me all the time that every show should have one of these, because everyone loved to see this kind of situation.

And then, of course, finally (but perhaps most crucial of all in the production of a big musical show) is the question of the chorus girls.

One can be charitable in the theatre world, and I am proud to say that it has always been from the chorus girls that I have had the greatest recognition. It was, and still is, very strange to note the efforts that are made by these girls to get into a production. Many of them, of course, need the jobs badly. It is for this reason that I always made it a point never



WAL PINK.





to insist on a girl having any experience. All she had to have was a sense of rhythm, good looks, and be intelligent enough to learn what she was taught.

Singing was a thing apart for which I would engage a special type of chorus girl, but it was essential that they should all be taught dancing, and as the dancing that they were being taught at that time was new, consisting of steps that only came into existence through syncopated music, it was just as easy to teach a girl who was not a professional dancer as any other.

I have had many auditions at which I had to book girls, and this has always been a very trying ordeal. I always make it a point at these auditions never to let anyone know which girls were engaged and which were not. I would tell them that those engaged would hear from me, and from my own private notes I would only write to the girls whom I thought suitable.

It is almost incredible but when I used to ask the girls to get into a circle and walk round while the piano was playing, say, a march tune, I would often find a great many of them who actually could not walk to time. These, of course, could never become dancers, and they had to be turned down.

Among some of those turned down were, on various occasions, girls who were not dependent on the stage for their livelihood, but who merely wanted to adopt it as a career. I had some curious offers during my days at the Hippodrome. All kinds of money were offered by those desirous of obtaining parts, and on one occasion a girl, who is to-day well known as a leading artist, offered me in notes a thousand pounds if I would procure her

a small part in one of my shows. If this girl reads these lines she will laugh, because she was clever enough to have got on without paying such a high fee for the opportunity. In fact, she made good purely on her own ability and talent, and is to-day one of the leading stars on the London stage.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ERRORS

**B**UT, however much theory and knowledge one may bring to bear upon production, the true value of a show can never actually be judged until the first night, as a curious incident which I will now relate may serve to demonstrate.

I was in America on one of my many visits, and saw at one of the principal revue theatres on Broadway two famous American comedians. They always played together; one taking the part of a "rube," which in English may be translated as a country yokel or "greenhorn," and the other taking the part of a "dame," that is to say an elderly woman.

These two artists had two or three comedy scenes which convulsed the audiences. In one scene one artist sat in the coachman's seat of a "buggy" with a "property" horse, and took on as his passenger the other, who was attired in woman's clothes. The dialogue and situation were extremely funny, and I, who was searching at that time for comedians, immediately made them a proposition to come to England. The salary was very high—I think it was about £400 a week—but I engaged them on the spot, as they were at that time two of the most successful comedians in America.

They duly arrived in England, and they started rehearsing unlike any other star comedians I have ever engaged. They played the parts at rehearsal as if on the first night. They read their lines out loud and did everything they knew at each rehearsal. It is a curious fact, but at the same time a very irritating one to a producer, that most of the well-known "star" comedians are in the habit of rehearsing in a voice which is almost inaudible. They merely mumble through their parts and, as a rule, give very little indication of what they intend to do as regards either situation, character, or "business."

By "business" in the theatre we mean mannerisms, "gags," comedy tricks and characteristic movements which procure laughs should a particular line or situation fail.

Harry Tate, for instance, hardly ever raised his voice above a whisper, and only rarely did Billy Merson or George Robey let themselves go in rehearsal. They reserved all the tricks that they had up their sleeves for the opening performance. Now and then, Robey would interpolate some quaint remark or inflection in the course of his part, but this was done more to relieve the tension and nervousness of everyone on these occasions; and in this respect Robey was remarkable. He would always come in at the most terrible moment of rehearsal, say, at a late hour at night when all were tired, the scenery was wrongly constructed, the costumes were misfits, and so on; and in the general depression which everyone, from a principal to a chorus girl, was subject to, he would suddenly appear in a comedy wig and some "prop" and

do something which would make everyone laugh and put us all in a good humour again.

These two comedians that I brought from America made the chorus girls and all those present laugh immensely each time they rehearsed. This worried me.

I have always felt in the course of my rehearsals—and in this I am not alone, for I know several other producers who are the same—that when the chorus girls and company of a musical production laugh at any sketch or artist in the show at rehearsals, there is something wrong with the artists or the scene.

I was so worried about these two comedians, in fact, that I asked Sir James Barrie to do me a favour, and come in and see them from the stalls of the Hippodrome one day. He came, saw, and heard them, and expressed his enjoyment. He liked them very much, he said, and I was very much relieved. But as we went on, I felt that I was taking a tremendous risk in entrusting the whole of the comedy to these two.

I realised that if they failed the whole show would fail; for a production, no matter how enormous and how beautiful, cannot live without good comedy, and good comedy, even by the greatest author, can only be put over the footlights by great comedians—hence their big salaries.

At last, a few days before I opened the show, I made up my mind to go out and secure the best English comedian I could and put him in on top of the two Americans that I had under contract. My salary list was already high, but I did not care. It was essential that the show should be right, and

I could make all sorts of reductions after we were safely launched.

I scoured the country for the best man available, and eventually decided upon Harry Tate and his Boys. I engaged him to interpolate two or three of his own comedy scenes which he had been playing on the music halls in the country, as well as a sketch or two that I supplied him with ; and I prepared the show accordingly.

Now, in a revue where there is no plot or story to link it together, it is essential that every item should be different in every way. Different in tempo, in character, in colours, in ideas, in every way different. That is to say, if a scene the humour of which depends merely on the dialogue occupies a certain spot in the show, it is essential that a fast musical number should follow, and then some speciality dancing act. After that, say, another big production musical number, and so on. The audience must not be allowed to get fidgety and restless : no item should be too long, and the various scenes—all as different from each other as possible—should follow each other in rapid succession. Some sections of the audience will like one thing and another section will be completely bored by it.

On the opening night of the revue with these two American artists, therefore, I arranged that their first entrance, which I intended should be early in the show, should be made in their very best comedy scene. I wanted them to “get over,” as we say, on their very first appearance. If new artists do not make a good impression right at the commencement of a play or revue, it is most

difficult—some say impossible—for them to recover.

I then saw that immediately after their entrance, I should have a very strong production number, and immediately afterwards Harry Tate was to come on. I thus felt I could recover from the bad effect should these artists fail.

There is no need to dwell on what the feelings of a producer are on the opening night of his show ; but I must say that my feelings on this occasion were redoubled. When the house lights go down and the footlights go up, and the roll on the timpani in the orchestra starts the overture, the thrill is intense. All that you have dreamed of, worked hard for, all your pet ideas, are about to be paraded before your eyes in their complete form, and you wait to see if the others think the same as you. At that particular moment you can do nothing. It is all up to the principals, chorus girls and boys, orchestra, staff of stage hands, electricians, property men, etc.

In my heart I used to compare it with the thrill of the " off " cry at Epsom before the Derby. In the two hours which follow after the overture has been played an enormous gamble has been enacted. Thousands of pounds have been spent in an effort to please, and if during those two hours something goes wrong the whole pace of the show suffers and a first night audience quickly arrives at the decision that the show is no good, or, worse still, " only good in spots."

On this particular night I waited anxiously for the appearance of these two comedians. If they succeeded in making a big hit, I knew I should be



spared the anxiety of looking for other comedians for my next show, if not . . .

When they came on, they received a welcome in a big round of applause. They had been well advertised, and they set about their scene in a brisk manner.

I waited for the laughs . . . but to my dismay they did not come. It is impossible to describe what my feelings were when a scene, which was only staged with one object—to amuse—proceeded tediously and painfully, creating neither mirth nor interest.

On these occasions the audience began to cough. This is to a manager or producer a sure indication of boredom. No matter how many members of the audience have colds, it is curious how few of them ever cough if they are interested in an artist or in anything occurring on the stage. When their interest flags, then the cough start. Other producers will bear me out that this is a most dreadful experience on a first night.

And this is what happened when these two gentlemen were on the stage playing the famous "buggy" scene. I knew from experience that if they did not get the audience during the first minute or two, they would never do it. Comedy is spontaneous and immediate on the stage, and so is personality. If a comedian feels that the audience is not with him, he feels it quicker than anyone else, and beads of perspiration roll down his brow. If he is a brave man, he will fight it out and try to get the audience every moment. But this is a *rara avis*; as a rule they feel terror-stricken and they slow up in pace, and what is bad becomes worse.

This scene, which was only supposed to last six minutes, seemed to me to last a year. The last line of the comedy sketch was "Good-bye," and was uttered by the dame character as "she" sat and rocked in the property carriage, with her partner driving off their property horse. When the time came for this to be said the poor artist, waving his hand to the silent audience, added another line unrehearsed—"Good-bye for ever."

I quickly reckoned up how much the engagement would cost the production, and sighed.

Fortunately, one of my biggest production numbers followed, and the enthusiasm of the house being regained, we proceeded with the show.

I rushed round to the back of the stage, got hold of the stage manager, went through the sequence of the performance and made slashing cuts. These cuts consisted of the future appearances of the two American artists. I then went into their dressing-room and I found them very depressed.

Before I could speak, one of them said : " Chief, we don't seem to get this audience. I guess it's no use our staying here. A boat sails Wednesday—the ' Mauretania '—don't you think we had better go back ? "

My feelings may be imagined. They had a long contract at an enormous salary, and here was an opportunity of cutting it out. I did not want to appear anxious, and I tried to cheer them up, telling them that perhaps they would do better later on. They seemed to be very downhearted, and they said : " It is going to do us a lot of harm in the States if it is found out that we did not make good over here,"

I said to them : " Let me make a suggestion. I will give you a letter saying how sorry I am that owing to the sudden illness of one of you, you are unable to continue your performance here, and then you can catch the boat on Wednesday and go back to America with the excuse that you were not feeling well and were unable to carry out your contract."

They were delighted with the idea, and I wasted no time in giving them the letter in question, which I wrote out there and then, getting their confirmation and release from the contract on the spot. We parted the best of friends.

I went back and found to my intense joy that Harry Tate had the house in hysterics, and the show proceeded smoothly. By the time the performance was over everyone had forgotten these two comedians.

It was just touch and go as to whether the show was going to be a success or failure after this error on my part, and it was only by acting promptly and keeping my head at the time that I managed to save the situation. Actually the show ran for nearly a year. I take no credit for what I did. It was just an inspiration on my part, and I was fortunate.

Keeping one's head at a crucial moment is not a rare thing in the theatrical profession, however, and I think it might be interesting to relate an example, unique in my experience, of presence of mind in a great artist during an opening performance. I am referring to George Robey.

Robey was rehearsing a scene which I had written

myself, and it dealt with a man up from the country, who, having had too much to drink, asked a policeman for the way to the Savoy. The policeman pointed to the famous Savoy courtyard, and Robey, misunderstanding the policeman, entered the Savoy Theatre instead of the Savoy Hotel, which buildings, as everyone knows, are adjoining. He went up to the box office of the Savoy Theatre and asked for a room. He was given a ticket in exchange and shown into a box. In this box he took off his clothes, opened the door, put out his boots, called for the chambermaids (the programme girls) and complained that there was an awful row going on in the big room opposite—meaning the stage—one man threatening to shoot another woman, and would she please tell them to keep quiet. He also asked one of the attendants for a curtain with which to stop the people looking into his “little room”; and said that he had put up with quite enough inconveniences, finding no bed in his apartment, and did not intend to put up with it much longer.

The idea was funny enough, but Robey, right from his entrance, felt that something was wrong. He was playing this as a “drunk”—the way the part was indicated in the manuscript—but somehow or other the idea did not get over—perhaps, who knows?—the audience thought that no man, no matter how drunk, would have made such a mistake. I watched Robey anxiously and felt that he realised that something was seriously wrong.

Then, quite suddenly, Robey switched over his part completely from that of a drunkard to that of a Yorkshireman up in London for the first time from the country.

He spoke in broad dialect, and from that moment the audience began to laugh. Eventually, he had them in convulsions with his predicament.

I was delighted, and ran back to congratulate him; and then Robey told me that he had felt the same way as myself when he first came on and that he realised that the scene would never have got over unless he made a big switch in the character there and then. That was why he played as a Yorkshireman. If that had failed, he would have tried something else.

This was Robey all over. He was a man who would gag on the first night just as fluently and easily as he would on the hundredth performance.

## CHAPTER XIX

### “ PINS AND NEEDLES ”

**I** NOW come to the history of “ Pins and Needles.” I often think that the story of my production of this would make an excellent epitome of all the ups and downs of the theatrical profession.

It was first produced at the Royalty Theatre, and despite the fact that it had a cast which included the late Alfred Lester, Edmund Gwenn, and a number of well-known artists, seemed to be a failure from the beginning. It was a serious matter to me if this show went wrong, as it was the first production I had taken on my own since I left the London Hippodrome.

I simply did not know what to do to make this show go. In the theatre a show very rarely changes from a failure to a success : it either begins well or badly. In the first case, you have the prospect of a good run and chances of a “ library ” deal (which means that so many seats are sold to the theatre ticket speculators), and this ensures your getting back your production money ; in the second case, it means losing money week after week, in addition to your usual outlay. A management hangs on, hoping for things to improve, making alterations,

engaging other artists, incurring additional expenses, and generally adding to its losses. It is a well-known maxim in theatrical business to cut your losses the moment a show proves that it does not draw the public. I thought of every scheme to advertise "Pins and Needles," for I knew that the show had good qualities. I even thought of giving away the theatre for nothing to the public for one week as an advertisement, but soon dismissed this from my mind as impossible, because if you have a failure you cannot even give tickets away to people. No one wishes to see it. On the other hand, if you have a really big success, you can almost charge what you like and the public will fight to get in.

Several people agreed with me that the show was deserving of a better fate. We were only taking about £60 a night.

One night, in the bar of the Royalty Theatre, I met a gentleman who had seen the show several times. He was an elderly man—a Yorkshireman—and he was very much annoyed when I informed him that I should have to take the show off because the receipts were so bad. In fact he would not hear of my doing so, and told me that what was wrong with it was the theatre, which was not suitable for a revue. Why did I not put the show on somewhere else?

I told him that I had thought of doing that, but that the expenses incurred were already very high.

Whereupon this gentleman (whose name I promised I would never mention and whose name I have not mentioned to this day) offered to put up

£10,000 if I would move the show to another and larger theatre. This £10,000, he said, was to defray expenses, and if only the show made money, as he felt certain it would, he would merely ask for his money back and nothing else.

It was a more than generous proposition, and I decided right away. My friends even to this day laugh at the story of the "Yorkshireman with the grey beard" who agreed to put up £10,000 to transfer "Pins and Needles." They thought it was either a good publicity stunt or a good joke.

Just about that time "The Betrothal" was on at the Gaiety Theatre, and although it was an artistic success, it was a financial failure, possibly owing to the intense summer heat or the coal strike. I approached Mr. Edward Laurillard, who was in charge of the theatre at that time, and asked him if I could have the Gaiety Theatre should I wish to transfer "Pins and Needles" from the Royalty. The answer was in the affirmative, and I immediately began preparations for the change. It meant tremendous alterations, for the Royalty Theatre stage was much smaller than that of the Gaiety. The whole scenery had to be reconstructed, and additions had to be made to the chorus.

At that time I had Archie de Bear working for me as press agent, and I asked him one night to announce the fact to the press. He was afraid to tell the story of the unknown benefactor and did not dare to mention it to the newspaper representatives, saying that they would not believe him and would say it was a publicity stunt.



It was a very amusing situation. I asked him to call the newspaper representatives into my office at the Royalty the next morning, and told him that I would speak to them myself. This was done, and when I met a number of press men the following day I told them bluntly and plainly what the facts were. They laughed. I said: "There is a 'story' for you, if it is a good one you can use it; if it is not, don't mention it. Anyway, here are the figures. We are playing to £60 a night, losing £300 a week. No one but a madman would go to the Gaiety and pay three times the rent, add to the expenses the way I am doing, unless it was owing to some propitious circumstances such as I have mentioned to you." I was asked questions as to where they could meet this gentleman. I said: "He wishes to remain unknown."

A lady reporter from one of the picture papers asked me if he was in love with one of the girls in the show. I said: "No, he has met no one on the stage, and it is purely his enthusiasm for the show that has prompted him to do it."

The same day the *Evening News* had a whole column article about this gentleman. The fact that he came from Yorkshire made some of them approach Mr. W. C. Gaunt, the well-known Yorkshire owner of several London theatres, who immediately denied it. We had a great deal of publicity, which was followed by strenuous efforts on the part of the journalists to find and interview this "Santa Claus," as one of them described him. Some reporters would come to the theatre while the show was playing, and should they hear any member of the audience in the bar or elsewhere

speak with a Yorkshire accent, he would immediately be asked if he were the man.

And now came the task of turning the show from a failure to a success. The story of "Pins and Needles" is a romance in itself.

One of the very first things we did was to give a tip for the Derby of that year at every performance. This came off, the horse—"Humorist"—winning the blue riband of the turf as predicted.

Mr. Jack Joel, whom I am proud to include among my good friends, was delighted at the confidence we had shown in his horse, and came in a box on Derby Night at the Gaiety Theatre to celebrate the occasion.

Then there was the changing of the show itself. Several new artists were included. There was, for instance, the engagement of Maisie Gay, who was at the height of her vogue at that particular time, and of the Duncan Sisters, the two American girls who appeared singing in harmony syncopated numbers in a way which had not been heard in London before. They appeared in a scene which was made completely of white draperies, the pianoforte being covered with white felt throughout. One of the sisters played at the piano as she sang and the other one stood by her and harmonised. The elder one specialised in comedy numbers.

They made a very big success, so much so that I was asked by the Honourable Evelyn Fitzgerald to allow them one evening to go to a private party at a house in London to sing. The Prince of Wales was to be there, and the girls were all agog with excitement.

Another thing I did during the run of "Pins and Needles" was to introduce a stunt which proved successful in the long run, but which at the time looked almost impossible as a proposition.

I engaged a well-known comedian—Tubby Edlin—who had been playing in the music halls in the provinces and starring for me in some provincial revues, to play in the show; and as often happens with star artists, he anxiously expected a big part. I, however, only wanted him for one specific purpose. It was to appear throughout the show in the following manner.

He was to come on at the beginning of the entertainment, which was supposed to represent the actual dress rehearsal of "Pins and Needles" and to ask the manager, who was conducting the rehearsal from the auditorium, for an engagement. He was to appear as a poor, woebegone artist, full of ambition, but lacking any verve or enthusiasm. The manager would then ask him to leave the stage and tell him that this was not the time to ask for an engagement. But Edlin would insist, and mention his remarkable versatility. He would announce that there was nothing he could not do in the course of the show.

The manager would then agree to engage him, and say that his business would be to appear at various times during the evening whilst certain changes of scenery and costumes were being made by the artists. And on each of these occasions he would have to perform a different stunt or trick.

Edlin would gladly agree to this, but the manager would point out to him that when the change of

scenes had been effected and they were ready to proceed with the show, there would be a "black-out," no matter what point he had reached in his performance.

Edlin, therefore, came on in different costumes at the end of nearly every sketch or musical number, and made elaborate preparations for his performance each time. But before he could commence to do anything the lights would be mercilessly turned out, indicating that the changes had been made and he would not be required. He changed his make-up and character on each appearance. Firstly, he would come on as an acrobat, resplendent in skin tights and a liotard, and holding in his hand a resin board which he would put on the floor. A trapeze would solemnly be lowered from above, he would announce that he would perform a difficult acrobatic trick, and just as he was about to start the lights would go out and he would disappear. Subsequently, he would appear in various guises—a sword swallower, a trombone player, and, in fact, in every kind of make-up, each one representing a well-known type of music hall turn.

When I explained to Edlin the part that he had to play he was brokenhearted. It meant very little to him, the way it was explained to him, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I induced him to stay on and try it. He did this more out of consideration for me than for any other reason, and admitted before the opening night that he realised that so far as he was concerned the show could very well do without him. I answered him that he would make one of the biggest successes of the evening, even though he did nothing at all on each

appearance, and surely enough on the opening night, after his first or second appearance, when the audience became aware that this poor artist, whom Edlin represented, was not given a chance to do anything in spite of his persistent efforts to tackle every kind of part, there were roars of laughter, and Edlin made a big name for himself.

Some years later he appeared before the King and Queen at a command performance in the Hippodrome in this character. He made their Majesties laugh so much that the papers all commented on it.

By this time "Pins and Needles," in spite of a coal strike and a tropical heat wave, was playing to very big figures at the Gaiety, and from a failure had turned out a big success.

The Duncan Sisters after a while had to leave, and then in looking round for another artist to replace them, I decided to engage Agnes Souret, who was supposed to be at that time the most beautiful girl in France. She had won the beauty prize in a competition organised by *Le Journal*, and her photograph appeared in every picture paper throughout the world.

I brought her over and advertised her as The Most Beautiful Girl in France. She could not do very much, and it was essential, therefore, that she should be presented in a way which would not tax her ability as an artist. I arranged for her to come out of a gold picture frame while an old man sang a song about his first love with an old miniature in his hand. She then appeared, descended two steps, and walked round to the old gentleman, who imagined his first love had come to life.

On her second entrance in the show she appeared with a basketful of sprays and flowers, which she threw gracefully to the audience, and then she made a little speech in English, which was specially written out for her and which she learned for the occasion. The speech was to the effect that she was very glad she had won the beauty competition because it had given her an opportunity to come to London, but she felt quite ashamed of appearing as the most beautiful girl, as she had seen so many much more beautiful girls than herself since she had been in London.

This engagement served its purpose, and we played to big business.

I may here mention that when I left the Royalty Theatre, I was approached by Mr. Thomas Miller, Mr. Archie de Bear and Mr. David Burnaby, and asked if I would let them have the theatre cheaply for a venture they had in view. A number of well-known artists had got together, I was told, and were working on a co-operative basis. They could not afford the huge rental I was paying, so would I let them have the Royalty Theatre, which I was still paying rent for at £100 a week. I agreed and this is how the subsequently famous Co-Optimists made their debut in London.

About that time I was coaxed to take "Pins and Needles" to America, and in a foolish moment I agreed to take it over in its entirety to play at one of the Shubert Theatres in New York City. Before I left, I engaged Mdme. Kousnetzoff—a great and beautiful artist—who sang operatic arias and danced marvellously. She had her own scenes painted by the famous Russian artist—Soudeikine

—and I was very hopeful of her making a big success, for Leon Bakst, the artistic brain behind the Russian Ballet in the early days, had recommended her very highly to me when he was designing some costumes for one of my productions.

Mdme. Kousnetzoff, however, seemed to be out of place in a revue, and as the business did not improve I eventually took this show off.

Speaking of Leon Bakst, I may mention, *en passant*, that he designed the whole of the costumes for my second revue, "Hullo, Tango," and that he charged the highest prices for his designs. Not only did he charge as much as £50 for a design for a dress, but he also insisted on his sketches being returned after they had been executed, because his paintings had a value of their own and fetched big prices. He used to exhibit them in various European cities and would dispose of them at a high figure.

Another condition he made was that every costume should be made by a special dressmaker in Paris, who, he said, was the only one who understood his peculiar type of work.

He took more trouble than most designers, for he went over to Paris, picked out all the materials and arranged in the actual workshops how the costumes were to be made. The result was extremely satisfactory, and "Hullo, Tango" was one of the most artistically costumed shows with which I have been associated.

When the time came for me to leave for America with my "Pins and Needles" company, I arranged to have an almost completely new production



ORIGINAL DESIGN BY LEON BAKST FOR  
"HULLO, TANGO."





ready, and also arranged for it to be sent to me in New York.

I was not going to take any chances with second-hand scenery and costumes, and I arranged to have everything new for the occasion.

I told my secretary to forward this consignment to me on board a special ship that would get the consignment over the water in time for my opening date, and I left some weeks ahead with my company to rehearse.

We were rehearsing the show in New York City roughly as it was over here, but with a great many other features which I had arranged to incorporate, and for which I had ordered scenery, etc.

About two weeks before we were due to open, I began to get anxious as to why the ship with my cargo had not arrived. The scenery and costumes represented an outlay of about £15,000, and I could not possibly do without them.

I knew the name of the boat, as my secretary had telegraphed it to me, but no one seemed to know where the boat was. Every time I cabled to England I was told that the boat was on its way.

Eventually, through a friend on the Shipping Board in New York City, I ascertained that although the boat had left London several weeks before, it had made calls at various ports on the English coast, looking for cargoes, and that it had only started for America a day or two before.

It is not easy to put on paper what my emotions were when I realised that within six days I had to open a production with a whole cast on my hands in a theatre which was being charged to me at the

rate of \$1,000 a day, and with the knowledge that the boat would not be over till at least three weeks after the time specified for my opening.

I sent a wireless message to the captain of the boat, to ask him how long he thought he would be before he arrived, and within two days I received an answer, saying that they were in the midst of a terrible storm, that they had had an accident and were drifting, and that he could not say how many weeks it would be before he got there. Of course, this meant disaster. I had to hustle to rearrange the whole routine of the show, practically rewrite and reconstruct it, have costumes made, and borrow and beg draperies and scenery to give some kind of a performance so as to fulfil my contract.

Much to my dismay I had had a lot of publicity before the opening. We had a wonderful gathering on the first night, the receipts being about £1,200. I was brokenhearted, for I knew that the show was only an apology for what I intended to produce, and surely enough it was not a big success. To my surprise it ran for about twelve weeks. It was a show that I do not think would have run for two weeks in London, but the novelty of an English show, together with the artists I had engaged, which included Miss Edith Kelly-Gould, a big attraction in New York, Harry Pilcer, Maisie Gay, and several other well-known names, may have helped.

The scenery and costumes arrived in New York not less than eight weeks later, and the Custom House officials asked for a duty to be paid amounting to several thousand pounds before releasing it. I was too disgusted with the whole affair, and



MISS EDITH KELLY-GOULD.



informed them that they could do what they liked with it.

It was dumped down on the docks and some time after sold by auction. I do not even know to this day how much it fetched.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE OTHER SIDE

**I**N all these visits of mine to America, where I have always been very well treated, it has been perpetually borne in upon me what a great pity it is that British capitalists do not wake up to the huge possibilities of the theatre industry. For to-day entertainment is a business, strictly a business, and a colossal one. The man who amuses you most and makes you pay the least money is the man who is going to achieve success in it.

Capitalists are investing millions in the theatre industry in America ; while over here it is almost impossible to get any banking concerns to interest themselves in the building of theatres. And this is not because there is no demand, for we are terribly short of modern theatres with a seating capacity and equipment which will make it possible to provide an entertainment of beauty and magnificence at reasonable prices.

The kinema theatre proprietors of America have made strides which are unbelievable to those who have not seen them with their own eyes as I have. Theatres are springing up over there by the hundreds—gorgeous, beautiful, modern theatres, with luxurious foyers and courteous attendants,

who refuse tipping of any kind. An entertainment is provided that does not consist of the kinematograph only, and the prices are pretty nearly the same all over the house—a matter of two or three shillings.

The men who are building these theatres are coming to Europe. Already they have sites in London and Paris, and more and more plans are being formed every day with a view to building more theatres with American money. Are we to let them capture our entertainment places?

I think it might be interesting if I tried to record some experiences of mine in the United States not so long ago, and also my impressions of some of the big men I came into contact with out there—the men who pull the strings.

The War, of course, has made a big gap in the European theatre, and it has taken years to recover. During these years America has not been asleep. She has created a new kind of music, a new kind of dance, a new kind of operetta, and a new kind of play.

"In America to-day," I was told by Mr. J. J. Shubert, whose name is well known on this side as one of the biggest theatre owners in the world, "a good play—just a good play—is no good. A play to make money must be a sensation." And to America we have had to look for "sensations" for some time past.

This does not mean that only successes come from America—heavens, no! But they have thousands more theatres than we have in England, and thousands more artists, and they must find something big in order to thrive.



The more I think of it, the more I realise the huge difference there is between the two countries with regard to entertainment. Just as England is far ahead of France, Germany or any other European country in commercialising the theatre in every form, so is America far, very far, ahead of us in this branch of industry, and it is well to admit it, in spite of the prejudice of English theatrical managers in this respect.

The great theatrical romance out there, of course, is the Shubert combination. This started with nothing, and within a comparatively few years has acquired the control of over eight hundred theatres.

There were originally three brothers in the combination, but now there are only two. The other brother was a good-looking boy named Sam. Lee and J. J. say to-day that he was the founder of the business and the brains of it originally. Poor Sam met his death in a train fire between New York and Chicago.

This was at the time the Shuberts were running the Waldorf Theatre in London, before the War, and the loss so affected them that they gave up in England and returned to America. There is not one man in the world who was a friend of Sam who need want a penny to-day. The two living brothers have seen to that.

Lee Shubert is a very dark, handsome man, with inscrutable black eyes. He is quiet of manner, courteous in the extreme, and gallant to a degree to every woman, down to the humblest chorus girl. He is shrewd beyond words, and a genius on the financial side of this colossal business.

J. J. Shubert is an enigma to all but his friends. But he is, possibly, a greater genius than his brother. He supervises and attends to all the productions that this concern put on every year, and their number is legion.

He will direct rehearsals of as many as ten different plays at one time. One is a melodrama, another an English comedy, two others are revues, two are adaptations of German operettas, two others American musical comedies, and so on.

He is a great musician. When he goes home from rehearsals—about four or five o'clock in the morning—a number of pianists and composers play over their music, and he will take those melodies he likes. He will tell a composer who has hit on a good strain exactly where he loses the lilt after a few bars of music, and he helps him out. He will then suggest lyrics. Also at this time of day he will read through manuscripts and consider dress and scenic designs sent to him from every corner of Europe and America.

He will attend a rehearsal and not say a word throughout. Then he will go home and hold a conference with the heads of departments. At that rehearsal, it turns out, he has noticed faults that no one else suspected.

The next day the parts are switched over, new people come up to rehearsal, a new act replaces an old one, and so on day after day. Then the show opens at some out-of-the-way town. J. J. Shubert is there through the most harassing and trying time.

His staff will look at him after a possibly dire first performance and ask him for his opinion. He

will answer, "There is nothing positive," and 'phones will be working all night to New York. Agents will be asked to scour for this or that artist, and within a day or two the show is transformed.

"It lacks a punch," he will say a week later. A "punch" has to be found or created. The show does not open in New York until this is accomplished.

For the revue I put on in New York in association with him our artists rehearsed no fewer than forty-two comedy sketches. "Why so many?" I would ask.

"We don't want titters; we want laughs," he would answer. "If one sketch does not hit them hard at one performance, we will try another one the next show."

J. J. Shubert always aims for the £8,000 a week success, and if this does not happen when the show reaches New York, it is again recast and transformed before it plays in Chicago or Philadelphia. And so on until it is right.

The big revue house of New York is, of course, the Winter Garden. This house has been true to its policy of spectacular revue ever since it was built before the War. On Sunday nights a concert is given at which the management are entitled to use any music hall artists or excerpts from any show that has been running during the week at any theatre.

They have lately been featuring at these concerts a master of ceremonies. Al Jolson was the first one. Al Jolson is the most famous of all American comedians. He works black face, and was the

originator of all the "Mammy" songs. He has had a million imitators, but there is still only one Al Jolson, and his salary is ten thousand dollars a week (about £2,500). He packs every theatre throughout America, and will not play outside his own country.

When I was looking after the London Hippodrome, he came to the theatre one evening and I did all I knew to coax him to play there a season. I offered him a very large salary, for England anyway—£500 a week. "No, no," he would answer. "Why should I take a chance? If I fail, look at the harm it will do me in the country where I have never failed."

But I am digressing. These masters of ceremonies at the Winter Garden change from time to time. At the commencement of last year the M.C. was Jack Rose, an English Hebraic comedian, who may be remembered as having played at the Palladium and other London music halls in his "act," where he told funny stories in his own inimitable fashion and accentuated every point by smashing at his straw hat.

Rose became a very popular figure at these concerts, and last March I attended one of them. Another young comedian was acting for the first time as M.C.—that is to say, he would introduce each artist in an amusing manner. I was standing at the back of the stalls, and I saw a dark, pale-faced young man walk up and down the promenade each time the M.C. came on, and I would hear him mutter over and over again, "Gee, he makes me so nervous!"

It was Jack Rose. He climbed over the orchestra

and, to a wild burst of applause, he started to crack "gags," break in his bowler hat and jump on it.

The young comedian on the stage attempted what he thought was a smart retort, but in reality, as will be seen later, a very tactless remark. He said, "Why do you jump on your hat when you have had nothing to eat for the last week?"

Some people in front of me shouted, "Cut that out!" and towards the end of the evening I knew why. Al Jolson leapt up on the stage and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I have some sad news for you—Jack Rose, a fellow artist, has to-night made what may be his last appearance on the Winter Garden stage. He was taken to the hospital two days ago to await what is a most serious operation, but no one on earth could keep him to his bed to-night, and he simply had to come."

Then, with a break in his voice, he announced that the following Sunday night concert would be a benefit for Jack Rose, and every artist in or near New York in any kind of show would give his services in a programme such as had never been seen. Moreover, not only would the Shuberts give the Winter Garden free, but add two thousand dollars to the fund.

The concert the next Sunday was amazing. Everyone was there. They collected I don't know how much money. It was explained that the cause of illness was cancer, and that although the operation had taken place, Rose's condition was grave.

Sophie Tucker came forward and read to the audience a scribbled message from the sick man.

Then she sang in Jewish a version of her sentimental song, "That Yiddisher Mother of Mine," and there was not a dry eye in the house. They all appeared to understand Hebrew.

A few days later Jack Rose died.

I tell this story merely to show how close together are the artists and the theatre-goers in the United States.

Another interesting thing in America is the enormous effect the picture theatres are having on the music halls. The picture houses are paying bigger salaries and giving continuous work to the artists.

The biggest competition for the music halls comes from the Loew Circuit, which books pictures and vaudeville all the year round, and is adding to its theatres every day. This part of the business is in the hands of Louis K. Sidney, a shrewd, determined business man, who is not frightened by anyone.

The Keith Circuit, of which E. F. Albee, a helper of British stage celebrities, was the head, is already threatening to bar artists playing the Loew Circuit, but the artists do not seem to mind. The salaries offered are so much higher, even though the work is more strenuous.

Also with Keith people an artist has to spend money on his new act, show it without any guarantee of engagement, and if approved, then there are committee meetings to decide upon the salary payable.

With the Loew Circuit it is different. I remember once he asked me to put on a half-hour revuette,

costing about 5,000 dollars. We discussed it for the first time and settled the deal during lunch.

The late Marcus Loew, a man whose name was a household word in the picture world, owned perhaps more up-to-date theatres than any other man. The story runs that he started some twenty years ago by hiring theatres for Sunday evening entertainments, in the course of which he combined variety turns and pictures. His scheme succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.

With Loew is associated the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company, and this firm's success last year was phenomenal. They produced "The Big Parade" "Ben-Hur," "The Scarlet Letter" and goodness knows how many more huge successes, which must have netted millions of dollars throughout the world.

The vice-president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer is Nicholas Schenck, one of the most charming men it is possible to imagine. He is more like an Englishman than an American. A great host and a man of his word, he engineers huge deals daily, and enters with a smile into contracts for sums that would make one's head reel. He is a great lover of our country. He is a brother of Joseph M. Schenck, the multi-millionaire head of United Artists.

Marcus Loew talked to everyone, calling them by their first names and allowing them to do the same with him, be the individual a humble artist, agent, or lyric writer. Loew has worked very hard all his life, and with all his millions had made very few enemies, before he died.

He adored England. He had interests in the

London Tivoli, and a group with which he was prominently connected had bought the Empire.

Just a few months before his death Loew told me that he no longer attended to any part of his business except the real estate end. He spent his time hunting up new sites for new theatres.

That appears to be the eternal cry in America—more theatres! More theatres!

Marcus Loew was a lavish entertainer. For the benefit of his health he once took a trip to the California coast a month or two ago, and invited many of his friends to go with him. A special train was hired for the four or five days' journey from New York.

When he was in New York, Loew made up big week-end parties for his country home, where every imaginable comfort was to be found—horses for those who like riding, yachts for those who like the river, and so on. But with it all he was a very modest man.

His big regret, he told me, was that British film manufacturers did not make further progress. If they showed only a little more promise in international film producing—mark the word “international”—and produce on a scale such as the public is being rapidly educated to expect, he said he would find all the capital necessary to assist them.

“I have helped them in Germany,” he used to say, “and you see for yourself that there is a big demand for the German film.” He was referring to the German film “Variety,” which was being shown at his theatre at that time.

A new invention put on at certain picture theatres



is the most startling that has been discovered in the entertainment industry during the past twenty years. It consists of a film showing an artist or a band of musicians, and as these appear on the film one hears the artist singing or talking, or the musicians playing, but with the most perfect synchronisation imaginable.

The sound of the human voice is intensified in proportion to the figure on the film. The lips or hands do not err for one fraction of a second, and the result is perfectly amazing. It is indescribable.

Years ago, here in England, we had an invention—I believe it was Edison's—which was calculated to show a film and the sound of the human voice at the same time. The illusion, however, was not there. The faults were so many, and although tremendous efforts were made subsequently to perfect the invention, nothing happened.

During my last visit to New York I accompanied Mr. Charles Gulliver, managing director of the London Palladium, and Sir Frederick Eley, the chairman of his company, to the Colony Theatre, and we were astounded at what we saw and heard.

The theatre was crowded, and so heavy was the booking that speculators hired the entrances of office buildings on either side and sold the tickets to would-be buyers at a profit and as a favour.

It is impossible for me to give any technical details as to this invention. I was informed that the film was photographed on a gramophone record, and that the instrument at present costs about £8,000; that the inventors were still working on

the invention, and that the price would eventually be cut down by two-thirds.

When this invention becomes universally adopted, as eventually it is bound to be, one can expect some startling changes. Orchestras can be done away with almost completely. A big symphony orchestra or the greatest jazz bands in the world can be seen and heard at the smallest hall in the smallest village. The possibilities are almost unlimited.

As may be guessed by its name, the Paramount, New York's new forty-storey kinema—the last word in cinematograph theatres—belongs to that wonderful group in the “movie” industry known as the Famous Players. This is headed by Adolph Zukor and Jesse Lasky.

Messrs. Zukor and Lasky, apart from having built up what is, perhaps, the largest film business in the world, have now amalgamated with two of the greatest geniuses the picture industry has created: I mean the two Chicago men known as Abe Balaban and Sam Katz.

These two young men—they are little over thirty years old—each started business some fifteen years ago in Chicago. Balaban and his family, who originated from Lithuania, had a very definite idea that a good entertainment could be provided in a magnificent theatre where the prices should be not more than sixpence and a shilling.

First they would build a beautiful theatre with every comfort—large foyers, comfortable stalls, courteous attendants, who would refuse gratuities in any form—and then they would give an entertainment not confined to pictures, but a continuous

show, comprising a big feature film, variety artists and a classical ballet or a revuette. All this they knew they could do if they could but fill their theatres, as the theatres were large enough to hold the money.

The other theatrical managers laughed at young Balaban's scheme, but he held to his idea until one day he met another young man, named Sam Katz, who was studying for law and who was also dabbling in the theatre. They had very little funds between them, but they had youth, ambition and determination.

The firm of Balaban and Katz soon became one of the biggest and most powerful concerns in the West. Balaban attended mostly to the artistic side of the business, while Sam Katz, the shrewd financial head, looked after both the business and the entertainment side.

And now, what has happened? The Famous Players paid these two men a price running into millions of dollars and took over the concern, with Balaban and Katz retaining a very large interest.

Sam Katz, who keeps strictly to himself and has hardly ever met the "big noises" in the theatrical business, must be among the busiest men in the world. One has to make an appointment for him to take a telephone call. He travels most of his time from one end of America to the other.

In his office he has a large map of the United States with different coloured pins showing the theatres which his firm control or book. He pointed the map out to me, and when I asked him how many theatres those pins represented he smiled and

said : "Seven or eight hundred—and we are building every day."

He produced a plan of the new Paramount Theatre, and showed me the sumptuous dressing-rooms they contemplated building on the back of the stage.

"Dressing-rooms for films ?" I asked.

He smiled that enigmatical smile of his once more, and said : "We don't know what we shall play in our theatres eventually. We are ready for any emergency."

And, surely enough, gossip is rife in New York as to the attractions that the future holds in store for these huge theatres where, at 3s. per seat, they can take about £10,000 a week.

Sam Katz is very busy in America to-day, but at the pace at which he is moving he will soon be ready to devote his time to other countries.

"When we have finished here," he told me, "we shall come across to Europe."

As a matter of fact, they are buying and building theatres all over the world. In London they have the Plaza and are building the Carlton ; and in Paris they are building on the site of the old Vaudeville Theatre on the Grand Boulevard. And this is just a preliminary. In the world of pictures in America they are absolutely convinced that theirs is the entertainment of the future.

The artists who play in these theatres have to appear four times a day, and in some cases, on Saturdays and Sundays, five times. This, it will be quickly realised, is an ordeal for the performer, particularly if his work entails a great deal of physical effort, such as dancing, acrobatics, and singing.

But the picture houses pay big salaries, and this makes it worth while. One of the "star" engagements made for these theatres, when I was last in New York, was that of Paul Whiteman and his Band. The salary paid was about two thousand pounds in English money, and the duration of the contract was forty odd weeks! How can anyone in the theatrical profession possibly compete with such propositions? The impression among British artists that they are not liked in America is absolutely erroneous. The number of British players in America to-day is incredibly large. I was never so surprised in my life as on my recent visits.

Right along theatrical Broadway I met British men and women, and I asked some of them why they stayed there so long. The answer was that they were needed there, and that the salaries paid were much higher than on this side. Of course, the expenses of living were also much higher, but that did not appear to matter.

When casting a play that has nothing to do with bootlegging, the American underworld, or any particular phase of American national life, the managers invariably fall back on British men. It was, therefore, surprising for me to read newspaper articles by a disgruntled British actor warning his fellow actors about going to America. This particular gentleman omitted to tell his brother artists the real cause of his troubles in the United States.

He went over to New York with a company of British artists, and imagined from the very commencement that the Americans knew nothing about the theatre. He refused to admit that the

Americans were better able to cater for their own public than he was.

If at rehearsals he were told by the producer to cut out a certain line or to say it in a certain way he would make a sarcastic retort such as, "Thank you, Mr. Belasco." (Belasco is one of the greatest producers of plays in the United States.)

Naturally, the American producer replied in some such way as, "Don't mention it, Sir Henry Irving."

This sort of thing went on and on throughout rehearsals, until one day the actor flung down his part and "walked out." His agent immediately went after him and warned him that he was in the wrong. The actor was allowed to return, but soon he left again, and returned to England.

The "Equity," which is the name of the actors' union in America, and which is the most powerful body of its kind in the world, is always anxious to protect any foreign artist. It will not allow any one artist even to rehearse for any play without such artist first becoming a member of the "Equity." But once you are a member no management, no matter how powerful, will be allowed to take a liberty with you.

Speaking of British artists in America, it may interest some people to know that Gertrude Lawrence, as a result of her success in an English revue in America, has since played in a musical play in New York, in which her salary was reported to have been 2,250 dollars on account of 10 per cent. of the gross receipts each week. As such receipts can be 40,000 dollars, her share might easily be about £800 weekly. Beatrice Lillie is now under contract

to another management on somewhat similar terms. I do not intend to infer that such salaries are the general rule, but if an artist makes a big success in America, then the bidding for him or her is high.

Marilyn Miller, starring in "Sunny" in America, is reputed to be making about £2,000 a week. She is one of the biggest box office "draws" in America, and I must admit that she deserves to be—she is the most exquisite thing on the musical comedy stage. She has beauty, youth, talent; she sings well and dances beautifully (acrobatic, toe, and "eccentric"), and has a great sense of comedy. It is wonderful to think of the progress of this little lady. Not many years ago she was here in London, appearing with her sisters as the Miller Sisters at the Four Hundred Club—now the Embassy Club—at a small salary.

One night, little Marilyn Miller wanted to "try out" a music hall turn on her own, and she was engaged for one week at Shepherd's Bush Empire.

I was there at the "first house" on the Monday night, and I well remember this little girl—she was quite a child—coming out in a pair of black and white knickers and bodice, looking more like a boy except for a mop of beautiful hair. She sang an American syncopated number in a deep contralto voice. The audience didn't quite understand her, and one or two of the gods showed it. They were not used to American songs in those days as they are to-day, when every newsboy whistles the tune of the latest song-hit.

Marilyn Miller showed one thing, however—that she had tremendous personality, and Mr.

Lee Shubert, on one of his annual visits to London, saw her and engaged her for the Winter Garden Theatre, New York. From that day she never looked back.

Unlike some of our English girls, she studied ceaselessly, singing and dancing day after day, and even now she practices and studies almost daily.

The number of high-priced artists in the United States is beyond reckoning. It will grow even larger as time goes on, owing to the big prices which are being paid by the picture theatres.

The picture theatres! We in England have absolutely no idea as to the magnitude of this class of entertainment in America.

Some time ago I was staying at the Astor Hotel in New York, right in the heart of theatreland. Next door the old Putnam building had been razed to the ground, and it was impossible to sleep at night. Drilling went on from an early hour in the morning, and the noise was deafening—even more deafening than the traffic on Broadway—and that is saying a great deal. A new building some forty storeys high was being erected.

It was the site chosen for the last word in kinematograph theatres—the Paramount. That theatre opened with a fanfare of trumpets, and its success already is the talk of New York. The receipts are reported to be in the neighbourhood of £14,000 weekly.

On this trip I have described I also came into contact with a great many of the kinema artists themselves.

There is in New York a smart and exclusive club



called The Mayfair. This gives special evenings during the season at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. Only people prominent in the theatrical world are allowed to be members, and even the smartest people in America cannot get in except as guests. I was present at one or two of these suppers, and I certainly met some extremely interesting people.

Among those dancing, for instance, was that sleek "villain" of the films, Adolphe Menjou. He was singing at the top of his voice, and as well groomed and debonair as he appears in his pictures. He has a keen sense of humour, and laughed a great deal at the characters he has to play.

"I tried to play the hero, the gallant adventurer, but it is of no use," he said; "they want me to play sinister rôles." He then said he would like to come and play in England.

They all want to come to England, but, alas! there is no money here!

Menjou told me that the greatest genius in the film world, without a doubt, was Charlie Chaplin. "I learned more from him," he said, "than I have learned from anybody."

Menjou, it will be remembered, appeared in Charlie Chaplin's serious production, "A Woman from Paris." He told me incidents to prove Chaplin's genius in film production.

"If," he said, "Chaplin were to abandon appearing on the films himself, and specialise in production alone, he would turn out to be the greatest producer in the world." And he meant "producer" of *any* kind of film, not only comic films, which are the most difficult.

Subsequently Menjou invited me to the Paramount studios on Long Island to see him play in a film based on Marie Corelli's book, "The Sorrows of Satan." When I eventually visited the Long Island studio, I was the guest of Adolph Zukor.

I remember I saw a studio larger than the Olympia in London, transformed into a huge garden, with enormous trees, terraces, fountains, and garden walks. One seemed transplanted suddenly into some magnificent English estate.

There were about twenty-four fountains, and suddenly from all of them descended fauns, who danced with nymphs at the base of each one. Every one of these fauns and nymphs was an acrobatic dancer of repute.

After one week this marvellous park, costing thousands, was destroyed. It had served its purpose.

Then we went downstairs and saw Lya de Putti, the beautiful young Hungarian film star who had just arrived for her first film in America, and she appeared to be rather sad about her make-up.

Zukor comforted her in Hungarian, and then we went on to see Richard Dix, eating an ice cream, and joking about Gunboat Smith, the pugilist, playing a romantic rôle in a film with him.

On the way out we saw Noah Beery, that tremendous actor who performed in "Beau Geste," where it will be remembered he played the savage French officer.

I was never more surprised. After seeing him play the most brutal parts on the screen, I was face to face with a delightful man with gold-rimmed glasses and a pointed black beard—a cultured,

suave gentleman, who appeared more like an English country squire.

We saw the beautiful Bebe Daniels and many others. It made you think of the huge audience these artists play to. Of all the artists in any country it can truthfully be said of these film stars that they appear before the footlights of the world.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MONTE CARLO

I HAVE spoken in a previous chapter of errors in the show business. I, like everyone else have, however, committed "errors" in other directions as well. Perhaps the nervous life which I have been leading is responsible for it, but it is a fact, that during my frequent trips abroad for the purpose of recreation I could not stop myself from following the trail of the Casinos, Race Courses and other amusements of this kind.

When winter comes we envy all those fortunate people who get into blue trains and are comfortably whirled away from the frost and fog of England to the warmth and blue skies of the Riviera.

We envy them because we visualise them basking in June-like sunshine or bathing in warm seas, or rambling about in a rich, summer-lit land.

What they actually do when they arrive at Nice or Monte Carlo is to take a short stroll along the *Promenade des Anglais*, go to Monte, just to see who's there too, and then go straight to the Casino to bask in electric light and bathe in the only sea they care for—the Sea of Chance.

That fever or passion for gambling is a matter on which I regard it as not only absurd, but impossible to moralise. People have the fever or they don't have it, and when they have it they are

willing to face ruin and despair that leads to suicide for the sake of a turn of the card or the spin of a numbered wheel.

I have seen fortunes won and lost at Monte Carlo, where everyone is always the same and always different, and I have seen every kind of gambler, as distinct in type as in nationality.

The most extraordinary gambling coup I ever saw was when my friend William Darnborough, won £60,000 at roulette. It was about fifteen years ago, and such an achievement has never been heard of since.

He naturally, did not win so vast a sum in one day. It was the result of a season of exceptional luck—and exceptional play.

Darnborough's method indeed, was—and is—a mystery. No one could make out whether he used a system or whether it was simply luck. Some of us thought it was a species of inspiration.

The man was uncanny. He seemed to cover the table with his money, and time after time he would win. People crowded round to watch him, all trying to discover "how he did it." I do not think that any other man has ever excited so much interest. The one topic discussed was Darnborough, his luck, or his almost infernal cleverness.

One day as he was playing he said to me, "Run over quickly to the Credit Lyonnais and get me two hundred and fifty thousand francs. I think I may need them."

He scribbled a note on a card, and I hurried out. When I returned with the money he said, "It's all right, I shan't need the cash. I've won." He had completed his £60,000.

In the process of winning it he had broken the bank several times—for breaking the bank merely means that one table has temporarily run out of capital. It is an achievement, nevertheless, to break the bank.

Having won his £60,000, Darnborough never played again. The last I heard of him was that he was connected with a motor-car firm in London.

Superstition, of course, rules life at the tables—and, though I don't believe in it, I have had one or two queer experiences. Once, for instance, when I was playing roulette, I could not make up my mind what number to back. Happening to glance at the clock, I noticed that the hands were a minute from five o'clock.

I decided, I cannot tell why, to back number five and every maximum connected with the number—*en pleine, carrés, transversales, red, odd*, and so on—and as the ball came to rest the clock hand was on the stroke of the hour. Number five won, and as I had staked fairly heavily, I won a considerable sum—though I forget now how much it was.

Another curious experience was what I may call the case of the barber with the blood stained rope.

I was being shaved one day in my room at the hotel, while the usual pigeon shooting was in progress when a wounded bird fluttered through the window, fell on the bed, and there died.

"That's a bad omen," exclaimed the barber, "but I can give you something that will counteract it. Here," and he took from his pocket a short

piece of rope, on which was what appeared to be an old bloodstain.

"That's been with me all through the war," he said, "I would not go anywhere without it. If you promise to return it, I will lend it to you for the day—bring it back as soon as you can, because I shall shut myself up in my room until I get it."

I took his magic bit of rope and went to the Casino, where I won—nothing.

Extremely amusing was the practical joke played by Maud Loty, the famous French comedienne. She went to the tables carrying a quantity of salt, and as soon as bets were made she spilt it profusely and conspicuously.

Gasps of horror went up on all sides, and the terrified players grabbed back their stakes.

Maud repeated the prank so many times and with such effect, that betting practically ceased. A polite but firm official finally led her away helpless with laughter.

Immense sums of money can be won at baccarat and also lost. I did both a few years ago at Deauville.

I was playing in the "*Privée*," a room from which women are barred, and where the highest play takes place. Luck was marvellously in, and after a series of successful coups I won about £17,000.

I then gave up the bank but I think that had I continued playing I should have more than doubled my winnings.

The end of the story is like the end of many gambling stories. In Biarritz a little while later I lost every penny in about ten minutes.

That did not worry me much, since I do not take

gambling seriously, thank goodness, but only too often playing for high stakes has its tragedies.

I once met at Deauville a certain South African ostrich farmer—a wealthy man, with a flourishing business. Now, as a rule, the very rich man does not play high—it means nothing to him—but this man was an exception.

He played ceaselessly, and for big stakes. His luck was bad, and before long even his resources began to feel the strain. Still he went on, without a sign of distress, and I heard that he was steadily ruining his business. He sold his car, his wife's jewels, his securities, and lost the proceeds.

"When are you going to stop?" I asked him, and he answered, "Not until everything's gone." "And then?" I said. "Then we shall see," was the reply.

We did see. A little time afterwards, almost penniless, he went to Ostend, lost everything, and shot himself.

Sometimes that insane sort of determination will win, as in the case of another man who decided to prove the theory that in baccarat there is always a minimum of one-and-a-quarter per cent. chance in favour of the banker.

He went on for weeks, selling everything he had—and that his wife had—until I thought I could see another tragedy on its way.

Then one day, I walked into the baccarat room and found that he was winning. He got back all his losses, and I believe that to-day he is making an excellent living out of that one-and-a-quarter per cent. chance.

Incidentally, there is at present a syndicate of



Greeks running baccarat banks without a limit—"banque ouverte," or "open bank." They will take any bet, however high, and they are making thousands.

Among the many queer tales about Monte Carlo, one of those I like best is the story of why warships are forbidden near the coast there.

It appears that some years ago a Russian warship dropped anchor, and the Captain came ashore and went to amuse himself at the casino. He lost steadily and heavily, including all the money for the crew's pay, and when at last he was completely penniless he went to the manager and demanded his money back.

He was of course, refused, although, in accordance with custom, he was offered a certain sum—known as the "*viatique*"—to cover his immediate needs.

He declined the offer and said "Unless you bring me my money by five o'clock this afternoon I will blow the Casino to pieces! I am desperate, and I have nothing to lose."

The authorities thought he was joking, or merely bluffing, and after he had repeated his threat they let him go.

At five o'clock however, a shell came flying over the Casino, and burst in the air. The captain had started to keep his word.

Hurried and trembling officials collected in a bag the money he had asked for, put off in a boat to the warship and the bag was delivered to the victorious captain.

After that a law was passed prohibiting warships near the coast—though whether the Russian

captain and his ship ever existed is doubtful. The law certainly exists.

Although it is not directly connected with gambling, I was provided with an amusing experience by the ex-Shah of Persia. He, myself and Solly Joel were discussing gems, when Joel showed us a small pink diamond of which he was immensely proud, since pink diamonds are extremely rare.

"Have you ever seen anything like that?" asked Joel, holding out the diamond on his palm.

"I haven't," answered the Shah; "I've never seen one as small as that. The one I own is about as big as my fist. I wear it on state occasions on my shoulder." The Shah, by the way, invariably wore white gloves when playing, and also he would never sit down at the table.

Hardly as cheerful, but more typical of the gambling spirit, is a little drama of which I was the accidental witness. It involved a foreign prince, whose name is well known, and a beautiful girl.

The girl was married to a rich man, and the man was about to leave Monte Carlo on business. They were at dinner, when the wife said, "Don't forget to buy me that diamond collar you promised me, will you?" The Prince was seated near by, and overheard the remark.

Next day the husband left, and that afternoon the girl received an anonymous gift of a puppy. Round its neck was a diamond collar.

The day after that another anonymous gift arrived, this time consisting of a great bouquet. Round the stalks of the flowers was a jewelled bracelet.

Similar gifts continued to arrive for several days, and the young wife began to have a shrewd idea that the stranger who sat at the table near hers was the giver.

Of course they met, and then followed the usual love affair and the usual divorce.

And, after that, the prince grew tired, and the ex-wife became an ex-mistress.

I forgot all about the affair until, months later, I went to an exceedingly second-rate cabaret in Naples, in order to see whether it would amuse me.

It failed miserably, because the first person I saw was the girl. She had no diamonds, and looked as if she had had no dinner either. She was dancing for a living.

She had played high, and won—but a gambler seldom keeps his winnings.

## CHAPTER XXII

### DEAUVILLE

**M**Y biggest win was, roughly, £20,000 at baccarat. I was gambling one day in the "*Salle Privée*" at Deauville, in which the highest play takes place, when Hannibal de Mesa, a wealthy Cuban and an inveterate gambler, was taking an "open bank"—open to the highest money.

He won steadily, and at last rose from the table richer by about £120,000. Most of the money was in the form of bundles of £4,000 each, so de Mesa called for two waste-paper baskets, swept the money into them—it filled both—and calmly walked over to the "*caisse*," or cashier's department, where he pushed the baskets over the counter, said: "Take care of these," and strolled out.

I took the bank next, at the minimum of £800. Usually one asks a pretty woman to cut the pack, so as to bring luck, but I looked round, saw M. Vagliano, a rich banker, and said to myself: "He has money. He will bring me luck!"

I asked him to cut. He was surprised, but he did so. I won the first coup. More money was put down and I won the next four coups.

Gabriel, the croupier, who, like all his clan, was usually absolutely immobile, leaned across to me as

he was raking in the immense pile of notes, and whispered :

"Do you know how much is here ? Twenty thousand pounds !"

I got up then and was about to retire from the game, thinking that I would keep what I had won and not tempt Fate any further, when in walked de Mesa, with his two waste-paper basketsful of money in his arms.

"Do you mind ?" he asked me, and then proceeded to cover all the money that was in the bank.

It was a direct challenge. Everyone looked at me and expected me to take it up. I could do nothing else, so I sat down again and said I would give him the coup.

When I dealt the cards the player on either side of me asked for a third card. I turned mine up to see if I had a "natural" eight or a nine, which would have beaten both tableaux, but I found I only had two picture cards, which meant no point at all. To the man on my right I threw an eight, to the left a seven. The player on my right, a Greek gambler of renown, did not wait until I had declared my point, but threw down a nine. From the expression of the player on my left, I knew that the seven I had given him had made his point, a very good one. I had only one chance left, to take a card at random from the pack in front of me and trust to luck that it was a nine.

Slowly I drew a card out. The top part showed four spades in a row. If there was a "pip" in the middle, it would be a nine. Was there ?

I drew the card and threw it down. There was a sudden hush. It was a nine.

I raked in my winnings then—about £30,000, as I said—and got up to go.

Someone then said: "Look at the cards. You will see that you would have gone on winning."

[\*] Now to look at the cards under these circumstances you must do one of two things—either allow another player to continue dealing your bank, or pay for the pack to be "burned"—thrown away, in reality—so that no one can follow you.

I paid for the "burning," took the pack, looked through it, and saw that I should have won at least three full coups, or another £120,000.

There was a lot of moralising after that. I was told that all good gamblers followed their winnings and cut their losses—which is true. I left the Casino, however, determined the only way not to lose the money was to stay away. I stayed away for a week. Then I went back, and the money went with me—it stayed there—in the usual way.

Another day I walked into the Cercle Haussmann, in Paris, and was stopped by a Rumanian, a constant gambler. He asked me for ten francs with which to buy his dinner.

I gave him the ten francs. He took it, walked over to the tables, sat down, and began to play. He won, and went on winning. Next day he was dealing banks of £800! He won £7,200.

Within a day or two, however, he had lost it all and borrowed another ten francs for his dinner.

Every gambler, of course, has tried, at one time or other, a system which he thought infallible. They are all disillusioned in the end. No system has yet been devised which can beat the roulette wheel, for instance. Probably the only

person who could have devised one would have been the long-dead monk—I forget his name—who invented the wheel as a toy during his spare time.

A player sits down full of his “new” system, determined to break the bank, his head full of intricate moves and figures.

He puts his money on, once, twice, and the third time, before he can do it himself, the croupier has put the money on for him, exactly where he intended it to go!

I have seen this happen again and again. The croupiers know all the systems. They are Sphinx-like, immobile, devoid of any interest or enthusiasm in the game, unmoved alike whether a man wins a fortune or shoots himself before their eyes. They are one of the most marvellous types of men imaginable—uncanny and dehumanised.

I had a friend, the Baron de M., who announced to me one day at Aix that he had a system by which you could make a clear profit of £200 a day at chemin de fer, provided your capital was large enough.

He started with, I think, about £4,000 as capital, and all he did was to play steadily each day until he had made £200 profit on his capital—and then stop.

He did this day after day for long or short periods, but always got up with £200 to the good. This went on for eighty days. On the eighty-first day he lost steadily thousands after thousands of francs, but still went on playing, determined to win it all back, and his daily five thousand as well.

He lost every franc; his capital of £4,000 and

his winnings from previous days of £16,000—£20,000 in all.

It cured him of systems—for a time. When I next saw him he had started a new one!

Another Frenchman I knew had a system by which, he said, he could protect himself on even chances. It seemed possible on the face of it.

The only thing which could beat him would be a run of twenty-five or more on one colour—a rare occurrence.

He sat down full of confidence, and was faced at once with a run of no fewer than twenty-nine on one colour! It cleaned him out.

The women who frequent the casinos are the most interesting of all. There are, for instance, the little old ladies who wait in queues every morning for the Casino to open. They live by gambling for small stakes, and their one object is to make their fifty to a hundred francs a day. Gambling is simply their day's work, to be got over as soon as possible, and that is why they always play during the morning, before the rooms are crowded. They have their little "systems" and their little superstitions, and the whole Casino staff knows them. They are careful, and they make a living.

At the other end of the scale are the men and women who gamble for all or nothing—and one of the most amusing, if slightly pathetic, features of Monte Carlo is the women gamblers whose jewels are always changing hands.

Anyone who is familiar with the place knows that he will see the same jewellery season after season—but worn by different women.

That necklace you saw last year on the tall girl



with the red hair has reappeared this year round the neck of a little brunette ; while the bracelet on the arm of that plump woman over there is as familiar to you as the croupier.

This queer circulation of jewellery is simply explained ; it is just one of the consequences of losing money at the tables. A woman who has gambled unsuccessfully sells the jewels given to her as a present by some patron or other, and back they go into the shop window, to be bought as a present for another woman, who " goes broke " and sells them in her turn.

The jewellers make a fine profit out of this traffic, and hang about the Casino on the watch for any unfortunate woman about to lose her last franc. So soon as the franc has gone, they make her an offer for her jewellery—a low offer—which she is bound, of course, to accept.

So much is this vulture-like usury a part of the business of some of the great Parisian jewellers, that it is not left to an underling. You will see one of the partners of the firm standing at the tables, his eyes on the woman who is losing most and wears the best jewels.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### SOME FAMOUS WOMEN

THE most vivid type of woman gambler in the casinos of Europe is the international "vamp"—the woman who is an out-and-out adventuress, notorious in every capital, marvelously dressed, divinely beautiful, as hard as diamonds, as dangerous as a tigress—the woman who openly preys on men, and yet never lacks admirers.

There are always fools ready to pay for her losses, her frocks, her meals, and her jewels when the last fool has failed to shoot himself.

One of the most notorious of this type owns a wonderful house in Paris, a veritable mansion, with a marble hall and marble staircase, full of beautiful pictures, furniture and *objets d'art*.

Even her bed and bath are said to be of marble, with concealed lights, which will give almost any effect of colour she wishes.

She will arrive at Monte Carlo or Cannes with as much state as a princess, take her seat at the tables, and fling down a bundle of notes to the tune of £1,000 as if it was dirt.

At the tables she is always bored, always "sick of money," always entirely disinterested in the play except for an admission that "it is not so boring as outside."

She loses her thousands, turns to the man she has selected as the next victim, and says: "Come and have a bottle of champagne. This bores me."

He goes dutifully, thrilled to the marrow if he is young and rich, as he usually is. When the champagne and her eyes have done their work, she usually "borrows" a couple of thousand "to get the losses back."

If she loses again she tears off her frock in a fit of pique, throws it on the table or on the floor, stamps on the debris, and rushes out in a splendid rage—sufficiently clad to be decent, but amazingly attractive to the young man, who thinks he has really met a woman of marvellous personality. He is usually a little frightened of her.

Part of the reason for this little parlour trick with the gown is that it again demonstrates her "contempt" for money, for what ordinary woman would tear off and trample on a Paris model which cost anything from eighty to a hundred and twenty guineas?

It may sound incredible, but I have seen this woman appear in four or five different frocks in one day—most of the others having been torn off!

Another adventuress who will be at Cannes this winter is a different type—very, very beautiful, but unable to do things in quite the same grand manner.

She is a pretty, soft-eyed little brunette, and will arrive with marvellous clothes, a few good jewels, and a certain amount of money. She will lose both jewels and money after a week or so, but by that time she will have found a man foolish enough to buy something better.

She will migrate later to Biarritz, Deauville, Aix and so back to Paris, considerably richer than when she set out.

A very different type of woman gambler was a certain elderly South American who travelled with her daughter.

This woman was apparently enormously rich. She travelled with two secretaries, a retinue of servants, cars, mountains of luggage, a barnyard of parrots, monkeys, dogs and horses, and jewels and clothes which made other women blink.

Once, I remember, one of her parrots was ill or broke a leg. A secretary was at once rushed to Paris and came tearing back with a celebrated surgeon-specialist whose fee for the "patient" was, one imagines, certainly not less than a hundred guineas.

A veritable war was waged between the different French casinos to secure the patronage of this woman. She would be sent wonderfully worded messages of invitation, asking her to honour the management by accepting their humble offer of special travelling accommodation, and assuring her that the management would be only too happy to arrange all the details of her visit, find her hotel accommodation—she always took the whole of the first floor wherever she went—arrange for garaging her cars, stabling her horses, and all the other details of housing her train.

I believe she is still travelling from casino to casino in the same style.

Another gambler for high stakes, who, however lasted only two years, was a wealthy Hindu merchant. He lost enormous sums, travelled and

entertained like a reigning grand duke, and was so sought after by the various casinos that at Deauville one year they gave him a special banquet of welcome.

He must have lost £300,000 altogether and sailed for India a broken and wiser man.

One of the astutest and most sensible gamblers I have known was a named man Henneberg. He is a professional player, and seldom loses. I asked him once if he had any principle on which he played.

"My principle," he replied, "is to keep myself perfectly fit. I box and run every morning, skip, take cold baths, ride and massage. I never gamble unless I feel in perfect health.

"I keep a healthy body and a cool head. Gambling is the hardest work in the world, the severest strain on brain and nerves imaginable. Never play if you have even a headache! I make money all the time because I always leave the tables the moment I feel tired."

One of the most attractive women I have ever seen at the tables was Maggie Meller, who afterwards became Madame Fahmy Bey, and whose husband was found shot in a London hotel.

Maggie Meller was well known in every fashionable town in Europe, but she was never a great gambler. She only visited the tables occasionally more because it was the thing to do than for any other reason.

She was a small, wistful, sad-faced little thing with haunting eyes, wonderfully chic clothes and lots of jewels. She was not pretty in the accepted sense, but irresistibly attractive.

Her marriage to Fahmy Bey came as a great

surprise. None of us who knew her ever imagined that she would marry anyone.

When she was accused of having shot her husband, after suffering unnameable cruelties, I and lots of her other friends went to the Old Bailey to hear the trial.

I shall never forget the wonderful sangfroid with which that pale, wistful little figure in black, sat in the dock listening to the evidence that everyone thought would hang her, yet totally unmoved.

When the jury came back and the foreman announced the words "Not guilty" she did not realise the import of his words. I think she thought it meant death. She just stood there still, pale and mask-like.

Then Sir Edward Marshall-Hall turned to her and whispered with a smile "*C'est fini*," and she understood. A wonderful smile broke out on her face, and she clasped her hands across her breast in an ecstasy of joy. She had gambled—and won!

Another brilliant woman whom I knew, but who gambled in a very different way, was Mata Hari, the beautiful spy who was shot by the French during the war. She gambled with the secrets of nations and the safety of her own life.

I knew her first when she was an obscure, unknown little dancer in a *café chantant* in Amsterdam. Within a year or two she had become known as one of the most fascinating and dangerous women in Europe. She was dark, voluptuous and alluring.

I met her last when she was staying at a famous hotel in London, a few weeks before her death. Her lover was the man who was employed by the

Government to spy on her. Yet she trusted him implicitly, and would have given him anything.

Then the order was issued for her to leave the country. The night before she was due to go to France her spy lover entertained her and told her of his undying love.

The next morning he saw her off at Victoria with flowers and kisses, knowing perfectly well that she would be arrested and shot as soon as she landed on French soil. I am glad to say that man was not an Englishman.

One reason why a certain type of man-gambler always likes to be seen in the casino with a well-dressed, heavily jewelled woman is that it gives him credit.

I know a man who has started—and finished—three or four banks; he was seen every day at Monte Carlo with a middle-aged, rather vulgar, much bejewelled woman.

“What is the attraction?” I asked him. “My dear fellow,” he replied, “there’s no attraction—but her jewels look well. They are my ‘props,’ only she doesn’t know it!”

Women have several times been the cause of fights in the different casinos. I remember once at Deauville seeing a well-known American film star who was much sought after enter the bar with a silly young American youth. He was rather drunk and had just won about £30,000 by simply sitting at the table and doubling all the time. It was a piece of amazing luck.

These two had scarcely entered when a Frenchman with whom the star was generally seen about came in with another girl.

The Frenchman was confused at being seen with another woman, and started a clumsy explanation, when he suddenly realised that the American youth was with the actress.

The two men glared at each other for a moment, and then the American whipped off his coat and started to fight every one in the bar.

A first-class row followed. The two girls went for each other, screaming like parrots, and the Frenchman was shrieking for peace and trying to defend himself at the same time.

Finally, he and the other girl, who was also French, left, but the girl waited outside, and when the actress came out she went for her like a tigress.

The actress got into her car and drove off, but not before the window was smashed.

After that none of them was allowed in the casino for some time, and even then only one at a time.

On another occasion an Englishman and a Turk had an argument at the tables, and finally seized the croupier's rakes and fought with them. The Englishman broke his rake over the Turk's head, and then they were both put outside!

Two Frenchmen also had much the same sort of fight in the casino at Monte Carlo, but they continued it outside with thick sticks when they were thrown out, and wound up by arranging a duel!

One of the most remarkable men I ever saw in a casino was Tahra Bey, the Indian fakir, who amazed London about a year ago. This man is a most curious character, a pale, full-faced, spiritual looking young man in a turban and immaculate European clothes. When I saw him last at Deauville he was the rage of the place. Night after



night he gave the most amazing and blood-curdling exhibitions of his "magic." He would stick pins and swords into his face and body, allow himself to be buried alive, and undergo a dozen other fiendish self-tortures.

Some of his tricks so upset spectators that many of them went out feeling ill. I saw J. J. Shubert, the American theatrical magnate, one day, and he announced that he was going to engage Tahra Bey for a tour in the States. I went with him that night to see the fakir's "exhibition." Before it was halfway through Shubert gripped me by the arm and said: "I'm going to beat it. I can't stand any more. This fellow's too tough for me—he makes me feel ill!"

I intended to offer Tahra Bey an engagement in London myself, but his manageress, a stout, blonde, middle-aged Frenchwoman, torpedoed me by saying: "Ah! But ze price? Ve have just received a telegram from ze King George, and he offer Tahra Bey a million pound to go to London. You offer more, hein?"

This was too much for me, I retired.

A few nights later I walked into the atrium of the casino, where those who do not care to gamble for high stakes can play "boule" for a franc a time, and there was Tahra Bey putting on franc after franc, his face white with excitement, his eyes gleaming, and his losses mounting up and up.

It was extraordinary to watch. Here was the most wonderful "magician" I had ever seen, an almost uncannily dehumanised man, clever to the point of abnormality, defeated utterly by a mere gambling machine!

It was easy to see that his failure to "bewitch" his play was annoying him, and I stayed to see how it would end.

Suddenly his manageress arrived, saw it all, and with a snort of indignation dragged him off, expostulating that he was ruining his prestige.

Among the real gamblers the most notable figures of to-day are the famous Greck syndicate headed by "Nico" Zographos. They play for enormous and apparently unlimited sums, win fortunes, and are always ready to take a bank for any amount. "Nico" is a young, stylish, sallow-faced man with a black moustache and an absolutely imperturbable manner.

He is a real "mystery man," for he came to Monte Carlo five or six years ago, unknown, from no one knew where, and to-day £50,000 or £100,000 means nothing to him.

The real king of Cannes and Deauville, now that Cornuche is dead, is, however, "Andre," a middle-aged Frenchman, who, from nothing, has amassed an enormous fortune.

I met him first in Ostend several years ago, and then one night, when in Paris, I walked into the Cercle Haussmann, which was then an unknown club in one little room.

There were eight or nine players sitting at the tables gambling very cautiously for five-franc "chips," only one of whom was not a stranger to me. That was Harry Pilcer, poor Gaby Deslys' dancing partner.

They were, as I said, slow and intensely cautious players, and I did not suppose that they had £25 between them. They asked me to play, and, full

of confidence, I said I would take a bank of £10 to start with.

I played steadily for three hours, during which they sat like stoics, eating an occasional sandwich, drinking champagne, and stolidly cleaning me out. When I rose I was £900 poorer. It served me right, for all I could have won was about £25, as I had thought at first.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A "MUG" GOES RACING

I BEGAN racing, as an owner, some eight or nine years ago, and shall always regard it as one of the biggest jokes of my life. It taught me such a lot. I thought one could meet the world's fair share of "slim" gentlemen in the casinos of Europe and the business worlds of the two capitals of England and France, but Newmarket undeceived me.

I realised that I was an unborn in these matters.

I began, as most "mugs" begin, by owning horses as an "accident." That is to say, that one day at Newmarket, when I was still a comparatively innocent and unshorn lamb, I bought one or two at prices which I thought then were cheap, but which I found out later left me nothing to smile about.

Colours were the next consideration, and I did not know how to choose them. Every man I met wanted me to adopt the colour of his favourite mixed drink, while every girl in my show thought that what suited her in silk things would suit my horse.

Finally I called in the representative of a firm of theatrical colour designers. I said to him in my office at the theatre :

"I've bought a racehorse, and I want a suit of clothes for it. Think of a snappy line in colours."

He, poor fellow, was far more at home with ballets and Ruritanian costumes, but he finally hit on something, and my colours were registered as "Grey with crimson points and crimson cap."

One of these horses I called Joyland, after a revue I had running at the time, and I won a race with her at Windsor, which pleased me intensely and demonstrated to my entire satisfaction that I was no end of an authority about horses and racing.

Another horse I christened Waltz, and he, I was told, was "sure to win." This cheered me immensely because I expected at least one winner a day! So Waltz was put in a selling race at, I think, Newbury, where he was "certain to win," and off we all went to rake in our certainties.

Half the theatrical profession was "on" the horse, and I backed it pretty heavily myself.

I shall never forget my half-comic dismay as I stood at the rails wildly cheering my horse, when suddenly I saw Matruh, another runner, ridden, I think, by Fox, creep up, and shoot past me, neck and neck, it seemed, with my horse.

I waited with bated breath for the numbers to go up, praying that I had won. Then they showed: Matruh 1, Waltz 2.

Later I found out that Matruh, a far better horse than mine, had merely been put in this selling race so that his owner, an officer home on a few days' leave from the front, should have the satisfaction of seeing his horse win.

I was only sorry for one reason—that so many

of my friends, and even my company, had backed my horse.

Later I owned a horse called Hullabaloo, which I was again told was "bound to win," "couldn't lose," and was "just made to romp home."

By this time, however, I had learnt too much about trainers' bills, the omnipresence of veterinary surgeons, and the "certainty" of "winners," which had cost more to train than to buy, to receive such assurances without appropriate suspicion.

It is not surprising, then, that I should have been lunching at *Ciro's* with no idea that any horse of mine was running, when some one came up to me and asked :

"Has your horse got any chance to-day?"

Then I suddenly realised that the horse was running, and that I had been told he was "sure to win," so in a last glimmer of innocent belief I got up, left lunch and a man with whom I was discussing business, and rushed to the telephone, rung up my bookmaker, and told him to put a monkey on Hullabaloo.

I went back, sat down, and proceeded with lunch. Presently a waiter put a slip from the tape machine on my plate. Hullabaloo had won at 6 to 5!

Something of the same sort happened with another horse of mine called *Trinity Square*. He was running at *Windsor*, but again I knew nothing about it. I was at lunch in a big hotel, when the waiter came up and told me in a low voice that my horse had won at 8 to 1. I was not "on" that time!

It soon began to dawn on me that the ownership of racehorses was an infinitely worse responsibility

than having a first night every night of the week, for not only did one not know when a victory or defeat was to be sprung on one at breakfast, lunch or tea, but it was borne in on me that the horse, which I had hitherto regarded as a perfectly inoffensive animal, possessed a fiendish capability for developing all sorts and conditions of extraordinary ills while immured in the apparent safety of its stable.

This to me was a revelation, new and astounding, yet one could not be cynical about it, for the trainer's bills were proof enough !

One day I decided to break out. I was going to buy a horse on my own recommendation and no one else's. I would probe that great Horse mystery that Never Never Land which mere owners were expected to see no more than it was necessary to sign a cheque for.

So I started to bid for a horse. Halfway through, when I was nodding my head like fun, and looking very wisely and "horsily" at the auctioneer up came my trainer, tapped me on the elbow, and whispered in a shocked voice of doom :

"Why are you bidding for that horse ?"

"Because I like the look of him," I answered. "I know I don't know what racehorses are supposed to look like, but I like the look of this one," and I went on bidding and looking "horsier" than ever.

Eventually the horse was knocked down to me, and then the trainer solemnly told me that it was lame !

I replied that I didn't doubt it was, but equally I didn't doubt that he could cure it, especially as the

veterinary surgeons were so constantly in and out of the stables!

Then I went, feeling a foot taller, bought a "Racing Calendar" and a horseshoe tiepin. I decided to enter the horse for a mile nursery at Newmarket.

The trainer objected. He said the horse was only fit for a selling plate. I stuck to what I wanted, and christened the horse Smile, just a gentle hint.

Fully convinced by this time that I was a genius of the turf in embryo, I went off to Steve Donoghue and asked him to ride Smile. He accepted.

On the morning of the race I left London in my fastest car with only an hour or so in which to reach Newmarket in time for the race.

My chauffeur was going all out through Epping Forest when I saw in front a dirty, coughing, wheezing old taxicab clanking along at about fifteen miles an hour. As we passed the man in the cab waved to me. It was Steve!

I jumped out, dragged him out of his taxicab, put him in the car, and off we went again.

A mile further on we saw an overturned car by the roadside and two men with bloodstained faces sitting on the grass. One of them was holding something large and crimson in his hand, which to my horrified gaze seemed to be his inner mechanism!

Here was a case for instant mercy, for unstinted Good Samaritanism!

I leaped out and rushed up with words of comfort and benediction on my lips when the "injured" one rose and yelled cheerfully:

"Hullo! It's you, is it. Sit down and have



a bit of lunch," at the same time holding out in both hands two large red lobsters !

It was the late Earl of Wilton, and he and his companion had been thrown out of their car, grazed their faces, and then settled down to have a picnic lunch.

We collected them also, and set off again, doing a good eighty-five miles an hour. Then began a race against time.

We simply flew into Six Mile Bottom, a few miles this side of Newmarket, with only a minute or two to go before the race began.

The level crossing gates were shut, and a train was whistling in the distance !

I leaped out of the car, bounded up the steps to the signalman's box, and he pulled the lever and the gates swung open.

I took the steps in one flying leap down, jumped into the car, and we drove across the lines, and the gates swung back behind us just as the train came into the station !

We did the next mile or two on "wings," and drew up on the Heath by the weighing-room.

Steve rushed in, while I bolted into the ring and put all I could on Smile.

And Smile won !—in spite of his "lameness," in spite of the fact his owner had actually bought him without outside help, in spite of the fact that he was good only for selling plates.

After that I decided that the theatrical business was no longer my true vocation. I knew too much about horses to be wasted in London any longer !

Off I went to the sales afterwards, and started to bid for another horse ; I had already seen it win a

race with ease, and Steve said it was not at all bad, but "a bit green," so I went on nodding and winking away at the auctioneer until it got up to £450.

Then the man against me made one last bid and walked away. I was about to nod my head and make it mine when my trainer seized me by the arm and said:

"That horse is no good to you! Smile would beat it off the earth."

We argued while the auctioneer waited, but he convinced me, and I let the horse go.

That horse was By Jingo, which later won the Ascot Gold Cup and made thousands at the stud.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE EMBASSY

**I**N conclusion, I am going to tell the story of the famous Embassy Club.

It was on my return to England after the disastrous "Pins and Needles" trip that I first conceived the idea of opening a luxurious restaurant club in London.

This was to have the best food in the world, and I wanted to give an entertainment such as had not been seen on a restaurant floor at supper-time—the sort of entertainment that one saw in America before Prohibition came in.

I knew very well, at that time, poor James White, who met with such a tragic end just lately, and I told him of my intention.

Jimmy White agreed to go into the scheme with me, and I, in looking round for a likely place, fell on the old Four Hundred Club in Bond Street, which at that time belonged to Jack May, the well-known American promoter of night clubs in London.

We bought the club from him, I believe, for £9,000, and I had it redecorated completely, and the kitchen enlarged. The whole thing cost, I think, something between £17,000 and £18,000.

I hesitated a long time before deciding what

name to give it, but eventually resolved to call it the Embassy Club: my idea being to make all the attachés and diplomats from the various Embassies in London honorary members. The membership was to be very exclusive and limited, and the fee and subscription the highest in town.

One of the most important things, of course, was to engage a good *chef* for the restaurant, and in my search for this I visited several of the popular watering-places and holiday resorts in France. The best cooking I had ever come across at that time was at an hotel at Aix-le-Bains, which still exists. It was known as the Grand Hotel d'Aix. It was at this hotel, years ago, that Pierpont Morgan, the King of Greece, and other great celebrities used to stay. In fact, Pierpont Morgan had a special hospital built at Aix-le-Bains which he gave to the town, and which can still be seen.

One day I sent for the *chef* of this hotel. His name was Capezza. I asked him if he would like to come to London, and although he hesitated, having a good engagement at Aix-le-Bains, where he lived with his family, I pointed out that he need not worry about losing his engagement, for my offer would be much superior to his present salary. But even though I had a big figure in my mind I did not anticipate a request for a salary of £750 a year, which he asked for.

However, I did not let this stand in the way, and I told him that I would like to put him through a test.

I said: "Cook me a good dinner, the best dinner you have ever cooked, and if I like it, you can come to London."

Then he asked me: "What would Monsieur like to eat?"

I answered that it would be better if I did not tell him that, because in the ordinary way one has to tempt the patron of a restaurant with all sorts of specially cooked food, which should be good enough to please anybody. He agreed to prepare a special dinner for the following day.

I invited two friends, and I will say that the following night I had the most extraordinary meal I had in all my life. It never seemed to end. Everything was cooked with such delicacy that the greatest gourmet would have thought it was his birthday. We had sorbets two or three times during the meal, with liqueurs to whet the appetite, and then we would start again. When we reached the end of this marvellous repast, I sent for him and engaged him on the spot.

The Embassy Club opened, and Capezza was, and still is, the *chef*. Applications for membership came from a great many members of the aristocracy. I took great care not to mix the members, and to keep it as exclusive as I could.

It was now important to get a *restaurateur* to take charge who would have the peculiar gift, which only a French or Italian *maitre d'hôtel* seems to possess, namely, the art of being familiar with a client and yet respectful at the same time.

I engaged a man—an Italian, who had a good reputation—but he fell very short of what was required. The applications for membership were increasing, and although the club was not going as rapidly as I would have liked, I felt it had great prospects.

Jimmy White came in once or twice, and in his characteristic manner distributed £50 among the waiters when he came. He was impatient to see the club succeed, and it was difficult to get him to be patient and wait. I therefore made him a proposition, which he accepted, and I took over the club myself at a reasonable price.

I had a great deal of fun at this club. The waiters would crowd round me and serve me and ignore everybody else. Over and over I pointed out that I was the only one who did not pay, and that they should attend to the other clients, but in vain. It was a little out of my line to tell them what they should do in a hundred different cases, and I began to look around for another manager.

I realised that that great element—a strong personality—was missing in the club. I was not giving it the attention that I should have given it, and also I was not able to have my wishes carried out in my own way. Another of the difficulties that I encountered after opening was that of having to find room for the entertainers whom I had intended to provide at supper-time. There was no dressing-room accommodation, the floor was very small, and I realised very quickly that if I gave up any floor space to the entertainment, I should have to sacrifice some of my tables. I had, therefore, to abandon the scheme which I still had at the back of my mind and which I shall one day put into force. No one has yet had the opportunity of seeing a real entertainment—in fact, a whole revue—produced on a restaurant floor while the patrons are having their supper.

I was in Monte Carlo after about a year of this,

and one evening while playing *trente-et-quarante* at the Sporting Club, I happened to lose a large sum of money. On my return to the Hotel de Paris, I received a telegram from Luigi Naintre, whom everybody knows and loves in the restaurant world, offering me a figure, which was not very tempting, for the club. I remember I replied to him rather curtly, and asked him if he thought I was crazy to sell the club at that price. I added if he offered something round about a "certain" figure, I might accept. The "certain" figure I had in mind was the amount I had lost at the *trente-et-quarante* game.

The following morning I entered the rooms early, sat down at my usual seat, and played again. By lunch time I had recovered all my losses and was proudly going back to my *déjeuner* when a telegram was handed to me. It was from Luigi, saying that the figure I mentioned was all right, and that he accepted my offer, and that our solicitors would complete the deal.

Of course, under these circumstances, I was not pleased at the turn events had taken, and I have always regretted to this day that I was not in London at the time, for I would then have made arrangements for Luigi to come in with me and take charge of the club. He was just the man I wanted to take charge.

But as things were I took Luigi's offer, and he did with the Embassy Club what he has done with every restaurant he has been in charge of. He is one of the greatest *restaurateurs* in the world, and it was not long before this property had gone up greatly in value.



LUIGI NAINTRE OF THE EMBASSY CLUB.





Although it is not now so stringent in its membership, he has kept it on a pinnacle of its own, and it is a great satisfaction and pleasure to me that my dream has come true, and that this club is to-day the greatest and the most distinguished in London.

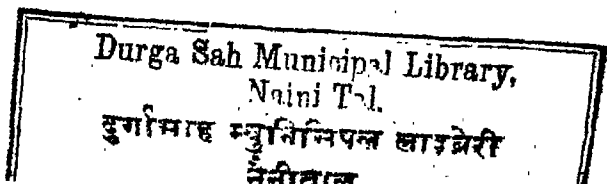
This little incident was something rather out of my ordinary line, but now, as I come to the end of this book and look back upon its pages, I must say that I have some difficulty in discerning precisely what my one line actually is !

I often feel that my theatrical ventures have only formed one incident in my life—a very important incident truly, but not the first, and not necessarily the last.

I never started out with any definite purpose in life : I simply took whatever chances that came my way, and risked what I had upon them. The great thing, in my view, is always to endeavour to see a little ahead of some of the others, and exploit your vision for all you are worth. It is the pioneer who always has to do one of two things—either suffer or benefit tremendously for his courage.

Life is so full of undreamed possibilities nowadays, that I am sure many other momentous episodes are in store for me. I shall be drawn to them, I know, by the old fever.

Possibly when the other half of my life is fulfilled I shall be able to write another book of memoirs. I cannot help feeling that, if I should, it will contain at least as much incident and adventure as this one. At any rate, I very much hope that it will. I wish I could see it now.





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